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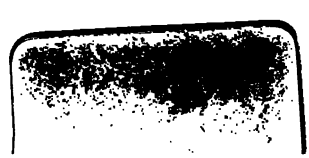
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HARRY EGERTON;

OR,

THE YOUNGER SON OF THE DAY.

VOL. II.

HARRY EGERTON;

OR,

THE YOUNGER SON OF THE DAY.

BY

G. L. TOTTENHAM,

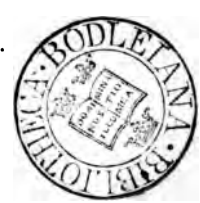
AUTHOR OF "CHARLIE VILLARS AT CAMBRIDGE."

"Non equidem hoc studeo, pullatis ut mihi nugis
Pagina turgescat."

PERSIUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HARRY EGERTON.

CHAPTER I.

"THERE are several persons who have many pleasures and entertainments in their possession which they do not enjoy. It is, therefore, a kind and good office to acquaint them with their own happiness, and turn their attention to such instances of their good fortune as they are apt to overlook," is the introduction to a most charming family picture, which Steele has drawn for us in the *Tatler*,—a picture which Jones, who has cultivated to perfection the artificial feelings of his age, would probably vote extremely tame, uninteresting, and dull. Jones is above the joys of domestic life. He needs some stronger food for his interest. These little home delights hardly come

within his sphere of thought. In fact, Jones would consider it rather womanish to confess himself alive to any interest in his own family. And therefore Jones requires to have it pointed out to him that, instead of its being beneath the dignity of a man's nature to take much delight in the simple pleasures of his home, he is, if he only knew it, throwing away opportunities of enjoyment far more attractive than the unnatural and artificial excitements which at present engage his leisure. Jones would probably throw down "the Caxtons" with a contemptuous sneer, saying that he could find all that sort of stuff any day in his own house. So he might, and enjoy it too. But he does not enjoy it, because he does not find it. He is above looking for it. He is Jones, who has no idea that "the love of a wife is as much above the idle passion commonly called by that name, as the loud laughter of buffoons is inferior to the elegant mirth of gentlemen."

Pleasant family pictures were probably more common in the stay-at-home days of the Vicar of Wakefield, when people were

compelled to seek in their own homes the interest and amusement which now, thanks to railways, they look for in any other place in preference. Locomotives have played the deuce with family affection, and many people would tell you that such a family as the Villars' was out of date now in their particular station in life. In these gad-about times it is as rare as it is pleasant to see a family where there is so much love and union and mutual dependence as there was in this house of Mottistone. You might have supposed that the father and mother were but lately married, such an attachment still existed between them—such a kindness, gentleness, and considerate attention did Mr. Villars show towards his wife. He would come into the drawing-room after dinner sometimes, and stand over her chair, with an affectionate interest that it would have charmed you to see, as if the mere fact of being near her was a pleasure to him. Or he would sit down beside her on the sofa, and take her hand, perhaps, in his own, with an exquisite natural tenderness that would

have perfectly scandalised your man or woman of the world. And yet he was a man of the world, too, and well known as one of the most polished, courteous gentlemen in society. But this, strangely enough, instead of causing his natural feelings to be hidden, only set them off the more. He was as polite to his wife as most other men are the contrary. His children had never heard him make a rude speech to their mother, or seen him behave towards her otherwise than as every gentleman ought to behave towards a woman, no matter how closely he may be connected by ties of relationship. Their respect, therefore, was never diminished; while their love was the natural return for the affection which he showed to them,—a love of spontaneous growth, which needed none of that attentive nourishment and fostering care without which some mothers find that the children's attachment to their father is liable to be merged in fear.

Then he would consult his wife on almost every point, and she would enter into all his interests with such a sense and

cheerfulness, and give her opinion with such a gentle submissive flattery, that he was sure to ask for it again. There was such a charm of expression, too, about her face, and such a dignity withal, that it was no wonder her husband admired her as much now as ever he had done in the freshness of her youth and beauty. He would tell her so sometimes—praise her taste in dress, and pay her pleasant little compliments, which, taken as they were meant, called forth some fond or playful response, and added another little link to the chain of remembered love which held them in its gentle coils.

By this loving and sensible mother Blanche Villars had been trained from her cradle, in all those virtues and charms of woman which she saw so daily exemplified for her imitation. And it was pleasant indeed to see the devotion which so much solicitude and care on the parents' side had engendered in their children, — the promptness with which Blanche would hurry to perform the slightest wish of either,—the thoughtfulness with which she anticipated every want,—the

innumerable little trifles with which she busied herself to contribute to their comfort. Her mother's stool was not in its usual position,—she would carefully place it for her; would arrange the cushions to her greater comfort; would see that her father's books and papers were exactly at his elbow, and would sit down beside him on a stool, perhaps, looking up into his face with a confiding affection that was beautiful to watch; and Lady Mary would look at him with such a happy smile, as he drew her towards him with words full of tenderness and love, and would thank God inwardly for having blessed her with such a husband and such a daughter. Or Blanche would sing, perhaps, and father and mother would lay down their books, and Mr. Villars would lay back in his chair, and think that all the music of the spheres was not equal to his daughter's voice. And then the piano would be deserted for the tea-table, and she would take them each their cup of tea, with a sweet attention which only merited the bright look with which it was rewarded. Ah! it

is rare, indeed, to find such grace of mind combined with all that grace of form. God makes the form,—the parents make the mind.

For several months one face had been wanting to complete the picture of this happy home; and the vacant place has now been filled. Father and mother have rejoiced over the return of their ill-used son, and Blanche is again happy in the society of her brother. The circle is complete. And for all but one within it there is perfect happiness. Charlie had not failed to notice the heightened colour on his sister's cheek when he mentioned that Egerton had met him in London. Formerly, she would probably have praised his constancy, and taken some interest in his movements; now, she had scarcely said anything, and there had been rather an embarrassing silence for a moment or two, until Lady Mary changed the subject—Blanche continuing to fidget nervously with her handkerchief.

Charlie had looked at her with a rather puzzled expression for a second, and, when

alone with his mother in her dressing-room afterwards, asked what it meant.

"But, mother, why didn't you tell me?" he said, when her misgivings had been confided to him.

"My darling boy, I have been hoping all along that it would come to nothing; and, therefore, I have never spoken on the subject to anyone except your father. Poor dear Blanche has never uttered a word to me about it. But I know her feelings, poor child, as well as if she had told me all."

This, then, was the reason why Harry had hesitated so about coming down to them.

"Does he care for Blanche?" asked Charlie.

"I'm afraid it's as much on his side as on hers. It's a sad pity," answered his mother.

But Charlie didn't seem to think it a pity at all. He thought it was the happiest arrangement possible that Egerton should marry his sister. There was not another man on earth to whom he would sooner see her engaged, and he said so.

"But I'm told that he has nothing in the world but the allowance his father gives him," said the prudent mother.

"What does that matter?" rejoined the son. (He was not yet a mother.)

"Matter! why, you wouldn't have her marry without any settlements?"

He didn't see that they were of much consequence; and, as to where they were to live, why, let them live at Mottistone,—lots of places for them to live at.

His mother smiled, as she listened to his vague eagerness, and said, "I hear, too, that he has quarrelled with his father; and that he has less prospect now than ever of being able to marry."

"He told me about that. Has he ever said anything about it to Blanche?"

"Not that I know of. She would have been sure to tell me, if anything of the kind had passed between them. I almost wish sometimes that something definite would take place: she looks so pale and worn to what she used."

Charlie had noticed a difference, he said.

"But, if Harry is so fond of her, why has he never proposed?"

"Why, my darling, how could he?" returned his mother, "with nothing to marry upon. But I must say, he has behaved very well. I'm only so sorry for them both, for I like him extremely as your friend, my boy," laying her hand tenderly upon his shoulder, "but not as a future husband for Blanche."

After a little further conversation, Charlie went off to dress, not at all convinced that it was not good for them to be brought together, and determined that Harry should be at Mottistone before very long; they must be happier together than apart. And, having made up his mind to this prudent decision, he went down to dinner, and was so gentle and affectionate to his sister during the evening that her old spirits returned again for a time, in the happiness of having him back again.

Egerton, meanwhile, was spending a dull enough evening in London. A few men whom he knew—in business or Government offices, whose duties have called them back

to London—enter the club, and they fall to execrating the gloomy weather, and the dulness and emptiness of the town. They stroll on to Pratt's; and Egerton takes up the sporting papers again, with a view to getting up the next week's racing; lays down the paper every now and then, to think what a prospectively Elysian week he might have had at Mottistone. "Better not though,"—and the paper is resumed with a sigh. But the same thought recurs again at intervals, and is discarded each time with greater reluctance. And yet he knew it was very weak not to be able to keep more control over his thoughts. How often had he told himself what a fool he was to be in love—a miserable younger son, a pauper! He knew very well that it would be ridiculous for him to ask any girl to marry him; and he had too much regard for one, at least, to condemn her to a long period of engagement, which might have no end. Accordingly, having decided that it was not to be, he continued to think about it, and wish that it could be. Weak young man! wasn't

he? and yet, strong young man! in that he had hitherto restrained himself from asking anyone to make herself miserable with him upon a small income, which would go but a short way to provide the comforts and luxuries which were necessary to their joint existence—or, at all events, enjoyment of life. Perhaps his self-denial was due to an unselfish consideration of the discomfort which rashness on his part might entail upon the object of his affections, rather than to any particular innate excellence of character; for, I suppose, he thought, like every one else in his position, that a crust and a cottage with Blanche Villars would be happiness for gods. Of course, if the crust became a loaf, the cottage a villa, or the loaf became a cake, and the villa a house, and so on, in an equal degree this happiness would increase. But these considerations hardly entered his mind: it was the hardship which a refined and high-bred girl would feel, in having to descend to the miserable economy of a small establishment, where she would have no gratification but

his society (which might pall at times),—no carriage, no servants, no dresses,—fancy that figure, he thought, in a cotton dress, stiff with starch and ugliness—bah! don't talk of it. It was the contemplation of this inevitable consequence which strengthened the self-denial and reticence which is now affording us all so agreeable and profitable a study. And therefore, having again made up his mind that anything like marriage was out of the question, he again proceeded to review the position, and speculate whether out of sight out of mind would apply in the present case; whether, if he avoided reminding her of his existence, she would, as he didn't hope, forget him. On the whole, he decided that she would not; that there were depths in her nature capable of a most enduring love, and that no amount of absence would make her untrue to him. He had a boundless confidence and trust in her constancy; and this, too, as he had determined that her love should die out for want of seeing him occasionally, was a gratifying point for contemplation.

Will any intelligent male or female reader perchance laugh at the determined self-denial which this excellent young man is practising? Will some one, perhaps, say that, as they are so exceedingly fond of each other, it is a pity they didn't marry at once, in spite of the luxurious tastes which they would carry with them into their limited establishment? Surely there will be found some one strangely-intelligent person who will advocate the love-in-a-cottage theory,—who does not believe that love flies out of the window when poverty comes in at the door,—who will deny that to people whose tastes are averse to small economies, the domestic necessities of a limited income are as great a hardship and annoyance as poverty to those of a lower degree. Most interesting person! let me look at you; for you wear the honoured mantle of the late Mr. Thackeray when you advocate these wise and prudent counsels. The penetration of that vigorous writer saw clearly the advantages which a marriage made for love has over one made for the mutual accommodation of the parties in-

terested; and, therefore, he has been at some pains to contrast the two, in favour of the former. But when he implies that Lady Clara Pulleyn ought to have married that penniless younger son, Jack Belsize, because Mr. and Mrs. Pendennis, having married for love, were so happy, he associates two separate cases, which have no common ground of comparison. If extravagant Jack Belsize, *alias* Harry Egerton, with his expensive tastes, had married the girl he was in love with, how could he possibly expect the domestic bliss of Mr. Pendennis, who had a fortune equal to his wants, and a wife of kindred tastes? Mr. Thackeray would have us believe that all love marriages are made in heaven, and cannot, in the nature of things, ever end in hell. And yet they do (even when commenced under most fortunate auspices), just as often as the made-up marriages which he deprecates, by representing for our edification the miseries of singularly ill-assorted couples.

To wander for a moment from our immediate point—it is quite as unjust to found

an argument against *de convenance* marriages upon the examples which he adduces, as it is to uphold the theory of love and marriage from under the comfortable roof-tree of Mr. and Mrs. Pendennis.

Could any woman have made a happy wife to Sir Pitt Crawley, even if she had not previously given up a Peter Butt? Could any woman have ever lived in comfort with such a mean, poor-spirited fiend as Barnes Newcome, even if there had not been a Jack Belsize to set him off in a yet more repulsive light? Love is a very desirable accompaniment to marriage, but there are many other things which women consider equally desirable, and which contribute much more to their future happiness than a transient burst of sentiment, which lasts out the month perhaps.

Prudent mothers know that carriages, and diamonds, and coronets, contain more elements of happiness and contentment than a handful of love, and therefore they very wisely endeavour to supply their daughters with these commodities. If they can fall

in love with the possessors of them, so much the better. Love and a coronet, I suppose, are the acme of a girl's hopes. But if she can't fall in love at once with the eligible party who is anxious to marry her, there is no reason why she should not grow to like him afterwards, if she has not already fixed her affections upon somebody else. And even if she does not, she always has her diamonds to fall back upon, which she would not have had when tired of the love of that younger son, with his two hundred a year. You may be sure that there are many less marriages made for love than are supposed to be, and many more made up than the occasional ones which are so virtuously decried. A girl persuades herself that she is in love with a man, because she wants to be married; or accepts him from a natural desire to get settled in life, and trusts to growing to like him afterwards. And very probably she becomes really attached to him in time, and their domestic bliss becomes the envy of her sister,—who has made a real love marriage, with everything else besides,

and who has to acknowledge now that there is quite as much chance of happiness in the one as in the other. It is the greatest mistake to confound all made-up marriages with those where the girl is forced to marry a man she doesn't like, to gratify the vanity or ambition of a scheming mother. It will be strange if such unholy matrimony is not productive of all the misery which the mother would deserve.

It may, perhaps, be hard that those who are really only endeavouring to provide for their daughters what they know from experience to be the chief medium of their happiness,—it may be hard that they should suffer from the impression with which the vulgarity and ill-breeding of some women have saddled London matrons generally. But they may always have the satisfaction of knowing that the unmannerly, two-fingered contempt which some women (who think that their rank atones for their vulgarity) show to a younger son, recoils

naturally upon their own heads. They may, of course, pretend to be only seeking to do their best for darling Alice or dearest Mary; but their motive for the cultivation of rank and wealth, when seen by the sordid light of their *parvenu* manners, never fails to have the right construction put upon it. Rank only sets off to greater advantage the coarseness of manner by which the vulgarity of their minds is exhibited.

Lady Mary Villars had such confidence in the good judgment of her daughter that she would have been perfectly content for her to marry according to her choice, if prudence had promised happiness as a result.

Lady Emily L'Estrange, if Harry Egerton had proposed to marry Florence, and had shown that they would have enough to live upon, would have laughed in his face; and would have confided to him, with all that graceful frankness which no artificial polish ever concealed, that she didn't know how he could have the impudence to entertain such a thought even for a moment. She

intended that *her* daughters, when they did marry, should not marry paupers; and she should be obliged to him if he would avoid any further mention of the subject.

There are, as everyone probably knows, chaperones and chaperones.

CHAPTER II.

"HALLO, Philip! How are you? I heard that you were in town,"—replied to a wooden hand and a chilly "How d'ye do?" —was "the greeting fair that passed there," on the pavement of Piccadilly, between Harry and Philip Egerton.

It was the Saturday before Newmarket, and the former was on his way to Tattersall's.

"My servant told me that you had been to Eaton Place," remarked Philip, with his own sweet smile. "My father is not in town, and will not be for the rest of the winter."

"I suppose not," rejoined Harry, irritated by Philip's expression; "he never is at this time of year. Are you going down into Leicestershire?"

"I shall take my leave next month," replied Philip.

He then excused himself from further conversation by pleading an engagement, and walked on with his usual creeping gait, looked back upon sometimes by occasional passers-by, who continued their way rejoicing that they had no connection with such a sinister-looking being.

Philip thought that Harry might want him to lend him money. "Don't he wish he may get it," he soliloquised with a great satisfaction. What his arrangements for the winter might be, he little cared to know, and as for compassionating him upon losing his hunting, that would have been very unlike Philip Egerton.

Harry did not, and, for that matter, had not time to mention that he was going to Tattersall's to hear something about the way the betting was going on the Cambridgeshire, and get up a little intelligence about the ensuing week. He would also have carefully avoided saying that he was going down to Newmarket the next day; but

Philip Egerton heard of his being there before he left London, and you may be sure that he took care to let his father know it. The intelligence, too, was spiced with occasional observations upon unprincipled recklessness, gambling propensities incurable, continued course of extravagance, &c., &c.; and Mr. Egerton, who had been secretly reproaching himself very frequently of late for his impulsive harshness, gained additional strength for the support of his consistency in the contemplation of the accuracy of his discernment, and the self-satisfaction which he derived from the thought that he knew all along that he was only doing what he was perfectly justified in doing. "Talk of economy and reform indeed! So likely; and here he is going down and betting and gambling at Newmarket, just as I suppose he has been doing for the last three or four years. *I* don't call going to Newmarket economising. No, no; I knew that no good could ever come of him."

And then the contrast between the warm-hearted second son, and the cold, serpent-

like eldest, would force itself upon his mind, and he would be angry with himself for thinking that it was possible to regret the line which he had taken, and would go into the drawing-room and talk irritably to his sister to relieve the perplexity of his thoughts. It never, of course, occurred to Mr. Egerton that his son might have been driven back again into gambling by being left without a home to go to, or the influences of home to keep him away from such pursuits; or by the absolute want of money, which tempted him to risk losing what he could not afford to pay, on the chance of winning what might relieve him from his more pressing difficulties. Mrs. Greville might have suggested this as a reason, had his name not been forbidden between them, and though she did mention it to Philip, we may feel pretty confident that it did not reach Mr. Egerton through that medium.

Harry, meanwhile, had gone down to Newmarket by the Sunday express, talked affably at the Cambridge station with one or two tradesmen of the place to whom he owed

money (who should be paid, he said, if he had a good week), and had put up with Castleton and two or three more at the inn.

The possibility of losing did arise now and then to disturb the happy unconcern which the society he was frequenting had a tendency to produce. For his week's expenses of trains, feeding with men like Castleton, who d——d the expense on all occasions; hiring a pony, and other small items, would be by no means beneath his consideration in the present limited condition of his finances, —with only the prospect of fifty pounds to be paid in shortly, to last for three months.

He commenced operations, accordingly, in very small stakes, and resolutely declined to play chicken-hazard in the evening. He had vivid recollections of previous losses in that room, which deterred him from trying his luck again. And therefore, as he had plenty of moral courage when he chose to exercise it, he continued to look on—a dangerous trial to that moral courage, after dinner, in a room full of excitement, in the

company of men who are throwing down their notes at random.

For the first day or two he lost on the course; and his pony began to acknowledge an additional weight—care was mounting behind the horseman. And towards the middle of the third day, he began to think that, as it would be simply impossible for him to pay his losses, he had better stop before he went a regular "howler."

At this juncture, however, a "real good thing," which Castleton had got private information about, came off. His spirits rose again, the pony moved more freely, his luck changed, and he began to pull back his losses; and by the end of the meeting he found himself with a very comfortable overplus after paying all expenses.

This he considered was "something like form;" and he even felt, as he returned from settling at Tattersall's on the following Monday, that the Fates were beginning to smile upon him again. He had had a very pleasant week, seen many old Cambridge friends, paid all his expenses, and had a pocket full

of crumpled notes to go on with. Not enough to make it worth while to pay any bills, but quite enough to stave off that season of rigid economy which had been staring him in the face before; that is, always provided that some insufferably importunate creditor did not insist on having his repeated applications attended to.

So our friend dined sumptuously at his own expense that evening, and after dinner took up *Bell's Life* and began to look over the Derby betting, turning over in his mind whether it might not be a good thing to back one or two horses for next year. His luck seemed to be changing; and before he went out he had made up his mind to begin a book on the following Thursday.

CHAPTER III.

JUST about this time there was an advertisement appearing every day in the *Times*, to the effect that if any person of the name of Egerton would call at the office of a certain Mr. Flint, attorney, in some small street far away in the slums of the City, he might hear of something to his advantage.

This bait had caught the eye of Philip Egerton on the afternoon when he met Harry in Piccadilly; and the very engagement which he made an excuse for walking on, was an intended visit to the quarter indicated. Philip never lost a chance of doing himself a good turn; and it was impossible to say what might not arise to his profit from following up the suggestion which the advertisement offered.

Accordingly, after walking for some dis-

tance down the Strand, to lessen the cab fare, he took from his pocket the slip of paper on which he had taken down the address, and presenting it to a cabman, asked if he knew the street.

The driver did not at that moment call to mind the particular street in question, but undertook to find it, having Shoreditch given; and eventually, after threading innumerable narrow and dirty lanes and passages, he deposited Mr. Philip Egerton at the door of a dingy house, which bore the name he sought upon a small, discoloured brass plate. A rusty, lean old man opened the door, and looked at him suspiciously, as he inquired if Mr. Flint was at home.

"Yes," he answered, curtly, without making way for him to enter.

Philip desired to see him.

"Name?" asked the other, with the same brevity as before.

"Never mind the name," Philip said. And after another good look at him, the man allowed him to pass into the house,

and ushered him into a kind of office off the passage.

It was a small, mean room, with a wire blind and painted wainscoting; a few tin boxes, which gave a kind of business-like air to the dirt and gloom which impregnated the atmosphere; a desk, a stool, and a few pigeon-holes. In the latter were one or two papers, which Philip, keeping his ears wide open, took the precaution of examining, to see what manner of man Mr. Flint might be. They had to do with criminal cases apparently; and finding nothing of much interest in them, he replaced them carefully in their respective holes; then looked over the blind, into the narrow street and gutter filled with old rags and bits of dirty paper, until his attention was attracted by the sound of whispering voices on the other side of a door which appeared to lead into an adjoining room. Observing that the door was locked, he crept stealthily across the floor, and laid his ear against the panel; but at this moment the whispering ceased, and Philip, resting a hand on either knee,

slowly bent down his head till the dexter optic came on a level with the keyhole. He cautiously turns his head, and applies his eye to the empty aperture, and hardly is it fixed when he becomes conscious that he is confronting ANOTHER EYE.

In an instant opposing currents of light struggle through the space which the withdrawal simultaneously of a head on either side has left vacant for their passage, and Philip Egerton feels that he has placed himself at a disadvantage.

In another moment, almost before he has had time to seat himself with calm unconsciousness upon the only chair in the room, the door opens, and a middle-aged man, of similarly lean, dirty, and rusty appearance to the one who had shown him in, enters the room.

Philip didn't at all like the cunning expression of his eye as he advanced, and asked, in the most insinuating of terms, to what he was indebted for the honour of this visit.

"Mr. Flint, I presume," said Philip.

"Quite so," was the reply. "You wished to——?"

It was a little matter of business, Philip supposed he might say, on which he had called. He had called, in fact, in reference to an advertisement which he had only seen that day.

"An advertisement,—to be sure,—yes."

"An advertisement in the *Times* addressed to persons of the name of Egerton."

"To be sure. Pray be seated," indicating the solitary chair, while he himself mounted the stool, and continued, without taking his sharp eyes off his visitor—"And you called with reference to that advertisement—quite so."

He then paused for more information.

"My name is Egerton," Philip said, in explanation; but to look at his face you would have been perfectly justified in discrediting the statement, from the mere fact of his having made it.

Mr. Flint only said, "Yes!" with the air of a man who has received the first instalment of a communication, and waits for more.

The stool still kept its eyes fixed upon the chair as if it wished to penetrate the other's most secret thoughts, and this, combined with the continued reserve which it maintained, was a source of much embarrassment to the chair.

"And I called in consequence of that advertisement," pursued Philip, determined not to be worsted in the encounter.

"Oh! you called in consequence of that advertisement?" said the stool, as if a new light had just dawned upon him. "Then perhaps you have some matter of interest to communicate in regard to it?"

Mr. Flint here took up a pen, and began to tap the desk with the end of it, to relieve the embarrassment of that hand which was not inserted in his trouser pocket, and looked towards the chair inquiringly.

"On the contrary," Philip returned, "I came to obtain information, not to give it." And he looked at the other for a moment, met that inquiring gaze, and again cast down his eyes. Philip never liked being

scrutinised; and this man seemed to be looking through him.

"Quite so—quite so, Mr. Egerton," returned the other, with an easy acquiescence that would have been quite pleasant, if it had led to anything. "I think you said your name was Egerton. You don't happen to have a card about you, do you?"

Philip's card case was in the pocket of his coat; but as he had no intention of showing more of his hand than he could help, he said that, unfortunately, he had not a card with him.

It *was* unfortunate, Mr. Flint said, though in the same breath he said that he had merely asked for it as a matter of form. Mr. Egerton was living in London, perhaps; would he oblige him with his Christian name?

After a moment's deliberation, Philip did so far gratify him; and he thought, as he again glanced at the attorney, that he could detect the slightest twinkle of satisfaction in the man's eyes as he heard it.

"Residing—I hardly caught the name," suggested Flint.

"My place of residence is immaterial at present," replied Philip. "When I am made aware of the nature of your intelligence I may be more explicit."

"Quite so—quite so," replied his interrogator, with the most imperturbable and irritating nonchalance.

There was another pause, during which the nib of the pen continued its monotonous amusement, and its holder looked over at his visitor from under his raised eyebrows, waiting apparently for his next observation.

Philip's attention, however, was occupied with a careful re-arrangement of the button of his glove, and at last the stool said—

"Then our interview need not be prolonged, Mr. Egerton?"

"As yet," rejoined the chair, "I have not accomplished the object for which I came, which was to know the purport of the intelligence which you have to communicate. Why have I come here, Mr. Flint? Will you be good enough to enlighten me upon that point first?"

"In answer, it would seem"—with a

scarcely perceptible twitch about the corners of the mouth—"to an advertisement in the *Times*."

"Addressed to any person bearing the name of Egerton. Precisely. My name is Egerton. What advantage am I to derive from the pleasure of this visit?"

"That would be difficult to say, my dear sir, until I am intrusted with a few more particulars with regard to your interest in the matter. Of course, I don't doubt, for an instant, that your name is what you profess it to be. You tell me that it is Egerton, with the additional prefix of Philip—Philip Egerton—Mr. Philip Egerton. But at present I have only your unsupported word for it;" and Mr. Flint said, with unctuous blandness and candour, "We lawyers like to be precise in matters of business. You have not informed me yet how you came by the name, what particular branch of the family you belong to, where you reside, or, in fact, given me any clue to connect you with the very interesting intelligence which I had hoped to be able to communicate. So that

my hands are tied; I am unable to proceed. If you had even a letter, now, it would be some proof of the correctness of your assertion, which you will not understand me to deny." Not for a moment—oh, of course not.

Philip saw that unless he yielded a point, the interesting information which the other had artfully hinted at would be withheld; so he began searching in his pocket for a letter, and curiously enough found that his card case had been there all the time.

"Ah! that was lucky," said the attorney, as he took the card handed to him.

"—— Guards—Eaton Place—quite so. Did I understand you that this was your father's residence, Mr. Philip Egerton?"

"That *is* my father's residence."

"Then I may infer from that that your father is still alive?"

"Quite so," again, on Philip's reluctantly admitting that the inference was a just one.

Mr. Flint now rested both arms on the desk, held the card by its four corners gingerly between the finger and thumb of either

hand, and stared at it intently, as if with the object of deriving inspiration for further progress.

"Your father," he said at last, without taking his eyes from the card,—"was he married in Ireland?"

Philip felt an uncomfortable consciousness that the other was having it all his own way, and he demurred to answering any further questions until he knew to what they ultimately tended.

"Very well, Mr. Egerton," rejoined the attorney, laying down the card, and crossing his legs. "Then we shall be unable to proceed. You are a perfect stranger to me, so far; and I should be doing an injustice to the parties interested in betraying to a stranger the information which I hold on trust."

Having delivered himself of this determination, Mr. Flint took up the poker, and made as if he would stir into life the smouldering spark of fire in the grate. But he didn't. For before the bars had been invaded, Philip sullenly answered, "Well, he *was* married in Ireland. What then?"

"And you are your father's eldest son, I presume?"

This point was yielded also.

"But Mr. Egerton had a second son, I think, whose name would be Henry." And the attorney glanced at the chair with a tentative indifference which produced the corroboration he desired. "Quite so," he said, as if he knew all about it, and only wanted to be perfectly sure. His face so little betrayed his thoughts, that you never would have supposed what an enjoyment he was deriving from Philip's ill-concealed chagrin, as point after point was extracted from him. Nor could Philip, even if he had looked him steadily in the face, have understood the satisfaction which each successive piece of information gave to the holder of his card.

"One more question, if you please, Mr. Egerton. Does your brother still live?"

Yes, he was living, Philip said. But he said it in a way which rather implied that he should be just as content if he had ceased to exist.

The attorney's sharp eyes were not at fault as to the under-current of thought which his tone implied.

"He is an only brother, I think. Am I right in supposing that your father did not marry again after the death of his first wife?"

Again an affirmative answer.

"He would, perhaps, prejudice your interests, then, in the event of your father's death?" suggested the attorney.

"He would have my mother's fortune."

"Which otherwise would go to the eldest son."

"How 'otherwise?'"

"If there should be no second son."

"Clearly."

There was a pause for a moment or two, and then Mr. Flint continued—

"It is a very happy chance which has attracted your eye to our advertisement, Mr. Philip Egerton, for we think we can put you in possession of information which, we venture to say, will be worth your while to possess."

Philip pricked up his ears. He should be prepared to deal liberally with them, he said.

"You are on good terms with your brother, I presume?" said Flint, with another casual glance at him.

"I don't bear him much love, I assure you," said Philip; "so you needn't be reserved on that account."

Like a gallant steed, he snuffed the battle from afar; and a gleam of vindictive joy that would have become the face of Shylock shot across his countenance as he anticipated something to Harry's disadvantage.

"To be plain with you," continued Flint, with a very peculiar expression, "it is more than doubtful whether this gentleman is your brother,—whether he *is* your mother's second son."

He fixed his eyes on Philip's face as he spoke, and read the vindictive and mercenary spirit as easily as if the words had been stamped in large letters upon his forehead. Cunning and clever though Philip thought himself, he had to deal with one who

was still more cunning, from longer practice, and clever enough to see that Philip's peculiar characteristics admirably adapted him to be made use of to the profit of Mr. Flint, attorney.

"Whose son is he, then?" exclaimed Philip, eagerly.

At present, Flint said, he was not at liberty to divulge all the particulars with which he had been intrusted. But if he had Mr. Philip Egerton's instructions to pursue his investigations further, he would do so, and should be happy if he would call again after a few days' interval.

"Oh! certainly, follow up the case," Philip said. But had he no information at present which would point to the solution hinted at?

None, the attorney said; none, at least, which he could impart at present. When next Mr. Egerton called, he should, no doubt, be able to explain more fully, and they would then talk about terms.

Philip didn't much like the mention of terms. It would depend upon what the information was worth to him, and he said so.

Mr. Flint would not ask him to pay for what was not good value for his money; and, in the meantime, he hoped he might depend upon his preserving a complete silence upon the subject.

It didn't need Philip's assurance to convince him that the secret was safe between them for the present; and when this was obtained, he rose from his stool. "Then I may hope to see you again, Mr. Egerton,—shall we say on this day week?"

Philip pressed for an earlier day, but it would not be possible, Mr. Flint said, for him to have advanced matters sufficiently before that day, and he politely held the door open for Philip's departure. Having seen him into his cab, he returned again to his desk, rubbing his hands with the air of a man who has done something entirely to his satisfaction. He was even chuckling,—and a chuckle on those features had a peculiarly unpleasing effect.

Philip, too, seemed equally pleased with the result of his visit; thought it so sharp of him to have answered that advertisement;

and anticipated the probable consequences of his cleverness with the most serene enjoyment. I wonder if, with all his cleverness, he would have recognised that spare figure which passed him under a lamp near his own house that evening. He scarcely noticed it in passing, and if he had, I doubt if he would have known Mr. Flint's face, with the addition of little black whiskers, and a *soupçon* of rouge on nose and cheek. It was that identical individual, however, and he was then on his way to No. ——, Eaton Place, as per Mr. Philip Egerton's card.

He turned and looked after Philip as he passed, and then proceeded, with a sort of smile, to mount the steps to his door, watching to see that he didn't turn back—knocked, rang, and asked whether Mr. Henry Egerton was at home.

Mr. Henry Egerton did not live there, the old woman who kept the house said.

"This is where Mr. Philip Egerton lives, —is it not?" asked Flint, referring to the card.

Yes; but Mr. Henry had not been there since the summer.

"Is he in London, do you know?"

Oh! indeed, said the woman, she knew nothing about Mr. Henry.

The man looked at her for a moment, and insinuating a coin, said he was particularly anxious to find him, as he had important business with him.

The woman took the coin, but still knew nothing whatever about him, or what his address was, or whether even he was in town.

She knew that he had called there not very many days before, but she also knew, from Philip's servant, that no answer was to be given to anybody who asked for Mr. Henry's address. So the man with the whiskers went away without having gained the information he desired.

CHAPTER IV.

WHILE all this by-play was going on, Harry Egerton had been enjoying himself at Newmarket, in happy ignorance of the interest which his affairs were creating in certain circles. And a few days after his return to London, a letter from Mottistone arrived, congratulating him upon having won some money, informing him that the regular hunting had begun, that there were plenty of horses in the stables, and that he must come down at once.

A bright flush had come over Blanche's face when her brother sat down by her side, with that letter in his hand, and told her that he had insisted upon Harry's coming down to them; that he had said he should go up and bring him down, if he didn't come. He looked kindly and sympathisingly into

her eyes as he spoke, and the colour grew yet a shade deeper on her cheek as she saw that he knew what was passing in her mind. Putting his arm tenderly round her, he kissed away the blush, showing, without a word, how fully he entered into her feelings, and how his affection for herself was only increased by her love for his friend. And then he went and posted his letter, and left her to her thoughts.

Harry, being driven into a corner, and unable to find an excuse for not coming, succumbed, as he thought, to fate, and turned up, a day or two after, at Mottistone.

That was rather embarrassing, that meeting in the drawing-room by themselves, the evening he arrived. It happened, by some mischance, that Blanche was there alone just at the moment; and heavens! what sweet constraint they were enjoying when her mother entered the room and created a diversion! How silent, too, Miss Villars' maid found her mistress that evening, as she took a little extra care about dressing for dinner!

After the first evening it was not so bad; and Harry, being for the present the only visitor in the house, his happiness might have been complete, if he could have given the reins to his feelings, instead of keeping that unnatural restraint upon them which interesting situations at times required. It was very pleasant being treated as one of the family, when he liked them all so much; and I dare say he only regretted the more that unfortunate circumstances prevented his being anything more than a kind of tame dog of the house. By the way, why do people so often apologise for asking one to stay with them by themselves? Must every individual in this hectic age be a victim to the prevailing disorder? May nobody be free from the imputation of not caring for anything but excitement? If you have no confidence in the attractions of your family circle, that is another thing; but otherwise a quiet family party may be a most delicious repose after tearing about from one crowded house to another. Here at Mottistone, at any rate, Egerton was much better pleased

that they were allowed to enjoy themselves by themselves for a time, instead of being in a constant state of "What are we going to do this afternoon?" "Blanche, darling, will you go in that carriage? Mr. Egerton and Charlie, and So-and-so will ride, I dare say;"—or being condemned to make conversation for some one he didn't care a straw about, while Miss Villars was engaged in a similar manner in some other part of the room during the two hours before dinner—those hours which now were devoted to firelight, arm-chairs, and luxurious abandonment of every feeling but serene enjoyment and repose.

Then they rode together when there was no hunting. And those walks before luncheon were only less pleasant than the quiet evenings after dinner, and the rubber of whist, perhaps, where he sometimes might experience the sweetly-tantalising delight of calling her "partner." And Blanche would come and stand by the fire in the billiard-room some mornings, and mark for them, when her household affairs were arranged; for she

relieved her mother entirely of this department. And then Charlie would propose a walk, and they would substitute sticks and hats for cues, and go down to the keeper's, or the garden, or the farm.

Blanche proposed one morning to take them to see some of her old women in the village, and they started off across the park; Charlie laughing at Harry's being let in for an amusement of this kind, and the latter protesting that there was nothing in the world which gave him more pleasure than paying benevolent visits to poor people.

"I'm accustomed to it," said the former; "she drags me all round the country sometimes. You can't think how interesting I look with a little basket full of medicine and clothes on my arm."

"Don't believe him, Mr. Egerton," said his sister. "He always teases me about my poor people. He says I'm a regular Dorcas."

"So you are, my dear Blanche. I believe all the old women and children for miles round have to thank you for the greater part of their wardrobe."

Blanche only wished that what he asserted was true. "Don't you think," she said, appealing to Harry, "that if one lives in the country, one ought to do as much good as one can about one's own place? I think so."

Undoubtedly, Harry thought.

"Charlie thinks so too," said Blanche, "although he does tease me about my visiting list."

Her brother told her that she was an excellent creature, and that he never meant to put her off doing any good she liked. "I'm sure it's much better than driving long distances to make formal calls on stupid people you don't care a bit about. Old Lady Wyville, for instance. You ought to see her in the country, Harry; she'll hardly speak to us. It's the greatest joke —she tries to dictate to the whole county, as if she was my lady paramount; but we, unfortunately, don't see it."

Harry knew the old lady in question, but he thought she was an old woman whom everybody laughed at in London.

"So they do," Villars said. "It's only in

the country that she thinks she can impose upon people."

"It is so good for people going to London," said Blanche; "it shows them how very insignificant they really are, when there are so many others there so much greater than they are."

"Well, it hasn't done her much good," said her brother.

"I believe it does good to some people," said Harry; "but it spoils a good many more. They're made much of in London, and then in the country they're unbearable. I know several young ladies who would come under that head."

"And I know a good many young gentlemen of the same kind," said Blanche, in return.

"Oh, yes,—eldest sons," laughed Egerton. "I dare say Charlie won't speak to me next year."

"What bosh, Harry! Besides, I'm only an ordinary one. If I was my Lord Villars, Marquis of Mottistone, at your service, it would be a very different thing."

"You think you might then get spoilt?" said Blanche.

"Well, I don't know so much about that; but mammas would take a great deal more interest in me."

"I don't find they take the slighest interest in me," said Harry, drily; and the others laughed at the comic tinge of melancholy which he infused into the words.

For a moment or two they were all occupied with their several thoughts, and then Harry turned abruptly to Blanche, and asked if she liked London.

"Ye-es," she replied, doubtfully. "Oh yes, certainly—a little of it. But I'm always very glad to get into the fresh green country again."

So was Harry, and so was her brother; and, being all of one mind, they wondered why people left their pleasant country places at the best time of the year, to stew in London instead.

The solution resolved itself into no occupation for gentlemen in the country at that time; and so it was agreed that society should

still be allowed to hold its annual Turkish bath as usual, and that they would continue to broil themselves upon London pavements during the summer months—leaving blooming flowers, bright landscapes, and cool green shades for gardeners and other insensate mortals, who had no delightful crowds and glowing pavements to frequent.

Solvitur ambulando,—and they stop before a neat garden gate; and Villars and Harry play about outside, while Blanche gladdens the eyes of an old bedridden woman by the sight of her welcome form.

Cottage-visiting we all know a good deal about, or, at all events, we ought to; so we'll just skip lightly on to a crisp Sunday morning's walk to church—a pretty church, with a high family pew, and all that kind of thing; hassocks, and every appliance for religious propriety.

And now that we are there—Ah! I remember, we came to look round us at the demure and edifying demeanour of the ladies; and to wonder whether the ceremonial piety which they cultivate so much

more than men is anything more than a meaningless show. Now, look at that attentive spinster over there; she always goes to church twice, never takes her eyes off the clergyman during the sermon (to be sure, he's a good-looking man), always stays to the sacrament, and is quite a study for devoutness during family prayers. Surely she must be a very religious person. She will tell you that she is, at all events. She can take you to task about your faith, and can quote texts at you by the hour, to prove that she may talk as much scandal as she likes, provided that her faith remains the same; and she can call you a scoffer, too, if you suggest that all this Scripture which she is quoting is only a meaningless jargon to her;—if you tell her that all the trite, high-sounding Scripture phrases which she discharges at you with such a satisfied superiority are merely so many uttered blasphemies, if the *practice* which they recommend is not cultivated. Oh yes, she can take you roundly to task about your disrespect for Scripture, and

your neglect of the services of the church. So she must be really a very religious person; and all her ill-nature, and her meanness, and the thousand and one little unchristian acts which distinguish her daily existence and her daily intercourse with her fellows,—all these, and many more besides, are to be condoned entirely, in consideration of the firm faith which she has of eventually going to heaven, and of having it in her power when there to laugh at the other poor deluded creatures who have thought less of the profession of religion, and more of the practice of it.

I'm afraid Blanche Villars would get a perfect shout of laughter from her; for, though she was pretty regular at church, and always very well behaved, and read her Bible too, yet she never quoted it; and I'm ashamed to say (for it is intended that you should like her), that she had not that wonderful confidence in the excellence of her own religion,—and (must it be confessed?) there was not upon her table a single memoir of any one evangelical divine who had adorned

his life by his faith, and who recommended his hearers to do the same, without troubling themselves about their actions. No; it is sad to have to confess all this about one so attractive in many other ways; but it really was the case. She thought a great deal more of being kind and considerate to all about her, of doing her duty at home and in the world, than she did about her faith; in fact, I believe she took that for granted, and rather thought that it was because of her simple love for religion that she tried to do what she believed to be right.

Delusion always demands our compassion, and so we must be sorry for Egerton too; for as he knelt beside her at the sacrament on this very Sunday, he certainly did think that he preferred her quiet, gentle, unobtrusive reverence to the long-drawn sigh of that spinster who knelt upon his other side, and turned up her eyes to heaven with the expression, "Here kneels a righteous woman," stamped upon every feature. Nay, he even went so far in his infatuation as to think that real beauty of character had

never come home to him before; and so impressed was he by his delusion, that this sacrament really left a feeling of religion in his mind, stronger and more enduring than any which had previously found a place there. How true it is that self-examination is one of the most important duties of every human being!

CHAPTER V.

THE following day was a by-day with the hounds some distance off, and the horses accordingly had been ordered for the afternoon.

Miss Villars, with her attendant squires, is some two or three miles from home. They have just settled down from a canter into a walk, and Blanche is regretting that her father will never allow her to go out hunting.

"Papa says that ladies have no business to hunt," in reply to Harry's "Why?"

"Isn't he quite right?" asked her brother.

"Because we are in your way," said Blanche, before he had time to answer. "Very complimentary, isn't he, Mr. Egerton? We always quarrel on this subject."

"It's not only that," said Charlie, interrupting Egerton's disclaimer of sharing his opinions,—"it isn't a feminine amusement, tearing across country, and getting jostled about in a crowd of men and horses. I don't think women have any business to go in for men's amusements. They look much better in their proper place. A masculine woman is almost worse, if possible, than an effeminate man."

"But you must admit that it's rather trying not to be allowed to go out when I see the hounds at home. Don't you think it's rather hard," she said, appealing to Harry, "to have to look on only when they meet at Mottistone? because I can really ride very well—even Charlie confesses that. He often takes me home by short cuts across country when we are by ourselves; and it's so provoking to go to the meets and not be able to go on."

Harry, of course, thought it was rather hard; but he also rather agreed with Villars, that hunting was a male amusement, best left alone by women.

"If you tell ladies they oughtn't to do exactly as we do," said Charlie, "they're immediately down upon you for being selfish. I'm sure you think so, Blanche,—confess."

"Well, perhaps I do," she answered, archly.

"How nice you'd look flying across country with your hair streaming in the wind, hot and red, and your habit all torn and covered with mud, without a hat probably—a regular Amazon!"

"But one needn't always look like an Amazon. There are a great many ladies who hunt who are not a bit like that."

"A few, perhaps; but most of them have a horsey tinge about them—which I shouldn't care to see about you."

"Why, Charlie, those must be hounds!" exclaimed Harry at this moment, pointing in the direction of some rising ground in the distance. "Look there to the left, there are some more people coming up; yes,—there,—now you see them on the side of the hill!"

And hounds they undoubtedly were, but

like the fly in the amber, they could only wonder how the devil they got there.

"They must have had a tremendous run," Villars said, as he stood upon his stirrups, eagerly straining his eyes to watch the movements of the pack, which was scattered over the top of the hill, trying to recover the lost scent.

More redcoats are appearing over the top, and the hill-side is now picked out with red and black spots.

They see the huntsman come up. The hounds are called together. He takes a cast round the top of the hill, hits off the line, and — hark forrard! away they go again, followed by a thin field, straight for where our party is halted.

Another check, and Blanche's eager eyes at this moment detect the fox crouching along with drooping brush not a field off them.

"Charlie, Charlie! Look there! There he is!" she exclaims.

And the other two snatch off their hats, and, standing up in their stirrups, give such

a shrieking view holloa as startles the very hedgerows beside them.

The hounds are on the scent again, and the whole hunt disappears for a moment or two in a dip of the ground, and now comes sweeping across the flat within a field of them. Mortal man could not sit still and look on.

"Come along, Blanche!" shouts Charlie, as he makes for the nearest gate, throws it wide open, waits to see the others through, and then crosses to the next one,—holds this open, too, for Blanche and Harry, losing his whip from the impatience of his horse, just as the latter passes through, and the gate shuts in his face.

Egerton sees that he is left on the other side; but the hounds were crossing the corner; there was no time to lose; so he calls out, "Follow me, Miss Villars," and they cut across to the next gate, and nick in just behind them.

Blanche has no time to think what has become of her brother. They are in the middle of all the grand excitement of a run.

The hounds are going at a tearing pace in front of them, galloping horses are thundering alongside, the proximity of red coats is sending the blood thrilling through her veins, and her horse, old hunter as he was, is pulling with a spirit and eagerness not to be denied.

Harry is riding one of Mr. Villars' hunters, and knows the capabilities of Blanche's horse, and away they go, accordingly, over fence and gap, for half-a-dozen fields of an easy country, soon leaving the tired horses of the rest of the field behind. He looks back, as he lands after each fence, to give a word of direction or caution, and to see that she gets over safely, and then away again to the next, without pulling rein. Avoiding a double post and rail, through which the only man in front of them came crashing on to his head through another gate, across a fallow, and then "Bravo!" he cries, as Blanche comes sailing over the smallest place he could find in a stiffish wattle, and they gallop along side by side close behind the hounds, which are fast getting up to their fox. It is a long grass field; they see him half-way across it,

with brush drooping and laboured action. Every stride brings the pack nearer to him; now there are not a dozen yards between them. Nearer, nearer—he feels their breath already—they're up to him—he's down.

So finishes that stirring burst of scarcely ten minutes. Only too short, Harry thought, as he stood by his horse's head congratulating Blanche on her horsemanship. And when he looks at her glowing face and heaving bosom, and her graceful seat as she tries to quiet the restlessness of her horse—whatever he might have thought before about ladies being out of place in the hunting-field, he changed his opinion now. The huntsman comes galloping up, throws himself from his horse, and scattering the hounds with his whip, takes possession of the mangled fox, and Blanche instinctively moves away.

Others of the field arrive, and then she begins to wonder what can have become of Charlie. Up to this, she had not had time to think that it must seem odd to the gathering crowd to see her alone there with Harry

Egerton. And now all thoughts of the short excitement which she had just gone through gave way to the conscious awkwardness of the situation. The master of the hounds comes and tries to persuade her to take the brush. She wouldn't hear of it. Her father would be scandalised. Where could her brother be? Had any one seen him?

One or two more men came up and took off their hats, and one had seen him riding along a road which he pointed out to Harry. They started off at once in pursuit, wondering if they should catch him, what could have happened to him, where he could be. "He can't have come by this road," Blanche says at last, after they have ridden at the same hard pace for two or three miles.

Harry thinks not either, and suggests that as he is riding one of Mr. Villars' horses, they had better go quietly for a little.

Blanche seems a little concerned to think what her father will say to her strange escapade, and Harry every now and then tells her that Charlie must turn up soon, he

should think—affecting an easy unconcern which he was scarcely conscious of feeling. For the glowing sunset was lighting up her face with a perfectly wicked malice of delight, and there *was* a certain embarrassment in finding himself riding along a quiet country road alone with her, of all people in the world.

They arrive at the lodge gates at last, and find that he has not gone through. Can he have gone in by the other gate? Interesting speculation! Horses meanwhile proceed.

The excitement of the run gradually re-asserts its claims upon Blanche's attention. That wattle must be jumped again and discussed; also that rather nasty little double which Harry didn't know was a double till he had got to the other side. Charlie, therefore, is temporarily forgotten, and papa, too, looms less unpleasantly in the distance.

It was some way to the house from the gate by which they had entered; and, to give the missing chaperon a chance of catching them up, they proceeded at a leisurely walk;

the road lying between fine old beeches and masses of tangled fern, which were aglow with the full glory of an autumn sunset. Each moment the colour deepened, and the late autumn tints changed into more brilliant hues. The gorgeous amber of the western sky reflected a majesty of golden light upon hill and valley, woodland knoll, and field, and fallow, on to the far distance, where the paling yellow merged into dim, misty blue. The whole scene was flooded with a deep, rich calm, which made its way, with a peculiar influence of its own, into the natures of those two who were riding through it.

Their conversation becomes desultory and more embarrassed, and confines itself at last to an absent exclamation of admiration as some fresh vista opens to the view, or as some new combination of glorious colour is developed.

There must have been something awkward about those pauses, for Blanche's colour would become visibly deeper, and she would smooth her horse's neck down

with her riding-whip, find something which required arranging about her stirrup or her habit, and, in fact, seem generally uncomfortable until the next object for admiration suggested an opportunity for a remark to either. She knew sometimes that Harry was looking at her, though she didn't see him; and then her eyes looked far, far away into the distance, and her riding-whip beat time, with a spasmodic action, upon the horse's neck.

Once there was a long pause, and she looked round just as he, too, looked up from the abstracted attitude in which for some moments he had been sitting. Their eyes met, for a moment only; but it was enough. Harry's horse feels a sudden attraction towards hers, and he is allowed to indulge it as he pleases. His rider's face is full of earnest passion, and his lips are just parting to say what (perhaps fortunately) he never said; for at this moment a *Deus ex machinâ* came trotting upon the scene.

The noise of hoofs attracted the attention

of both, and, turning in their saddles, they saw Charlie coming up behind them.

"Well, you two are nice people," he said good-humouredly, as he looked rather curiously from one to the other. "Here have I been doing all I knew to get up to you, and you galloping away like a house a-fire, as hard as you could go. I had to give it up as a bad job at last." Perhaps it was done on purpose.

Both, of course, protested that they thought he was before them all the time, and that they had only been trying to catch him up; and Charlie listened to their explanations with a sly, half-disguised incredulity, and wondered to himself why Harry, in fact both of them, had looked so embarrassed when he came up.

Mr. Villars was only mildly displeased with his daughter for having ridden across country with Mr. Henry Egerton as groom; but Lady Mary looked very properly shocked when she heard of it, and told Charlie that this sort of thing would never do. It must come to an end. Better for both of them.

"Well, Harry is going away in a day or two," answered her imprudent son. "And, after all, my dear mother, what was the harm?"

Lady Mary, however, thought there was a great deal of harm.

"It wouldn't have mattered so much," she said to her husband that night before they went to sleep, "if it wasn't for the peculiar circumstances of the case; but Mr. Egerton's name has been coupled with hers in London more than once, I know. I do wish Charlie would listen to reason a little."

Mr. Villars declared that he had such perfect confidence in his wife's tact, that he was quite content to leave the management of all such affairs in her hands; and he went to sleep very soon after, leaving the anxious mother to lie awake and ponder over her perplexity.

It would not, perhaps, have reassured her mind to know that while her daughter's interests were being thus discussed, that daughter had thrown open her bed-room window, and was sitting, wrapped in shawls

and thought, gazing out upon the cold round moon and starry sky, which vaulted in that wide-sleeping landscape of varied woodland shade.

> "So soft a night was never made for sleep,
> But for the waking of the finer sense,
> To every murmuring and gentle sound,
> To subtlest odours, pulses' visitings,
> That touch our frames with wings too delicate
> To be discerned amid the blaze of day."

The air was unusually warm, and minute after minute passed by, and she still sat looking upon the soft melancholy beauty of that silver night, without changing the rapt expression of her face, except perhaps for a more intensified and wistful look at times.

With a gentle sigh at last the window is shut down, and a few moments after all is darkness in that little room, save where the one bright moonbeam casts its solitary ray of hopeful light upon the wall.

CHAPTER VI.

It was no go. Harry decided that he never ought to have come there, and so he told Villars next day that he must positively be in London on the day after—sorry he couldn't wait to be there with the other people who were shortly expected—couldn't come back, thanks, because he was engaged to shoot in Norfolk the following week; as to returning again during the winter, that would be matter for future consideration.

And so the delightful misery which he had been enduring for so many days came to an end. The parent birds were very cordial, and very glad to have seen him; but they didn't say that they should be glad to see him again, and Harry knew very well that they would not.

It was something, though, to have the

memory of that last good-bye to dwell upon —that lingering shake of the hand!—nothing to notice, but just a little something more than the ordinary brisk or limp shake expresses. The interchange of eloquence, too, which that silent look conveyed! Oh! it was pleasant to think about; and it was pleasant to build upon it castellated structures of delight, high, very high up in the regions of the air, and to wander amid the tangled labyrinth of happy possibilities into which the mind would willingly enough be led by this decoying recollection. Deeper and deeper it would plunge into the mazes of enchantment, until at one touch of reality's ruthless wand, the whole structure, labyrinth and all, would vanish away; and the architect would be left standing on the dull earth gazing in despair after the little impish sprites of hope which were hurrying after it, extending their little fingers from their little noses in a most unnatural and irritating manner.

But Harry has transacted the important business which took him to London, and

has arrived by this time in Norfolk,—that county consecrated to game-slaughter and bag-parties.

With the wise, we are told, we shall learn wisdom; and with the sportsmen of the Eastern Counties it will be very odd if we don't pick up a wrinkle or two in the matter of sport. Hunting shop in Leicestershire, Norfolk and its satellite counties for shooting shop.

It is not to be wondered at, perhaps, that ladies who come from either of these districts should uphold the erroneous notion that men's conversation is generally confined to horses and dogs. They must be very amiable and charming creatures to submit with so little murmuring to all the sporting infliction to which they are condemned. For although the pheasant is a very noble bird, just as the horse is a very noble animal, equally as the latter may occasionally be ridden to death, so may the former fall dead at last if you shoot him over and over again, day and night, throughout the season.

Egerton found a party assembled, com-

posed mostly of what you may call professional guns,—men who spend the whole shooting season in touring about from place to place, in company with a couple of pair of barrels,—real sportsmen who understood their business, and whose shooting-coats scorned to succumb to age; whose right shoulders bore marks of last year's campaign, or hid them under a saving patch. Very different sort of man this from your young gentleman who goes out to shoot, got up in gorgeous raiment of soft velvet, with gay stockings below; and who stands shivering at the corner of a covert without making any noticeable addition to the bag. Yet they *can* shoot sometimes, these anomalies, just as the hunting man, who goes in for his flower and any other dandyism, can very often ride. But the conventional hunting man (though to be sure he is a miserable kind of man enough) is not quite so poor a creature as the man who shoots for the purpose of showing his taste in costume. The one must have a certain amount of pluck to go across country at all, even if he does take

more kindly to gaps and gates when they come in his way; the other creature only tempts one to pepper his parti-coloured legs to cure him of his paltry vanity.

"Do you know Lord Staunton?" asked their host, as Harry came into the room before dinner, and joined them at the fire.

"I used to know your father very well," said Lord Staunton, when Egerton had made his bow; "we have rather lost sight of each other latterly. He has a place in Leicestershire now, has he not?"

"Oh! he's been there a long time," Harry said.

"Ah! when I knew him better, years ago, he still had his mother's place. But he sold that, I believe."

"A long time ago; I don't even remember it."

"I recollect the first time we met," said Lord Staunton, looking into vacancy, as he leant back against the chimney-piece, and seemed to be travelling back into ages long deceased. "It was at Florence, soon after you were born, I should think. Your father,

I remember, had just lost his wife, and had come out there to join his sister. I should almost have known you to be some relation to her from your likeness. You know Lady Belvedere?" turning to his host—"don't you see a strong likeness?"

"Very; but he's like his father, too. Very like what he was at your age," to Harry.

Reminiscences of the younger days of Mr. Egerton senior occupied the conversation for a minute or two, and then Lord Staunton continued—

"Lord Belvedere was a shocking scoundrel—he treated your aunt most shamefully—never came near her during her confinement (she was confined at Florence just at that time); and I believe, if your father had not come to her, she wouldn't be alive now. She had got somehow or other into the hands of a parcel of Jesuit fellows, who never let her out of their sight—the rascals. As it was, I believe to this day that they made away with her child. The affair was hushed up at the time. But there were

some ugly circumstances connected with it."

"Were there?" Harry asked. "I never heard that."

"I can't recall them now," Lord Staunton said, "but I know that was the impression. She was supposed to have gone over to Rome at that time, and I fancy she has always been inclined rather in that direction."

"Who are you talking about?" asked another of the party who had just come in.

"Ah! what a beautiful woman she must have been," he went on, when he heard who it was. "I should have liked to have been in that Frenchman's place who shot her husband. I suppose God's earth didn't hold a more thoroughly unprincipled ruffian. And is she still hankering after Rome?"

"She is rather High Church," Harry said.

"Well, I'm sorry for her," said the last speaker. "I'm always sorry when anybody I know takes that line,—runs to crosses and

vestments, and says his prayers to a row of candles."

"The tendency is growing so fast," said Lord Staunton, "that I suppose we shall all be drawn in for a re-reformation presently, and go over to Rome in a body. Positively, a Roman Catholic told me the other day that that was what they expected; that the Reformation in Henry VIII.'s time was only a partial one, and that they were only waiting for us to come to our senses, and go back again."

"I'll take odds I don't come to my senses during my lifetime," said the other. "Why, the d——d dishonesty of these High Church fellows is enough to keep one clear of their mummeries. Why the deuce can't they say at once that they are Roman Catholics, instead of inventing such rubbishy misnomers as Ritualist and Advanced Anglican, and—and other names which they stuff down your throat, instead of Roman Catholic? There's just one point on which they don't agree, and only one, and that is the supremacy of the Pope. And as they don't acknowledge

him as their head, who is their head I should like to know—have they got a head at all? They are not Church of England, for we wouldn't acknowledge 'em; and, for that matter, they don't acknowledge us. They don't recognise the authority of their bishops, or of anybody, or anything."

"That's what I think is such a mistake in our Church," said Lord Staunton, "not giving the bishops more power. All the power they have now is merely a moral influence. If some pig-headed rector chooses to fly in the face of their authority, he can do it with impunity. He knows very well that the bishop will think twice about setting in motion the cumbrous machinery of the ecclesiastical courts against him. And even if he does disregard the expense, and the trouble, and the time, he isn't sure of getting the best of it in the end."

"Why, that's their very creed—bishops, bishops' authority, and all that,—and yet they do all they know to separate themselves from any authority. If I was a bishop I wouldn't mind what expense or trouble I

went to, so long as I put a stop to their trumpery processions and idol worship."

"If it's not put a stop to, we may just as well not have an Established Church. No one can be more conservative on that point than I am; but I cannot see the use of connecting the Church with the State, if the State is to have no control. The connection is a mere farce,—simply a form; much better to do away with it at once, before it decays internally, as it seems likely to do if this sort of thing is allowed to go on."

Dinner was here announced, and the conversation in the dining-room naturally turned upon sport.

"We shall have another gun to-morrow," said the owner of the coverts,—"a young fellow, a native of this part of the country, who is at present doing duty as curate in London somewhere. You met him here last year, Staunton: young Rowley."

"Oh! yes; and an A 1 shot he was too. You don't mean to say he has gone into the Church. Hasn't that knocked his shooting on the head?"

"Not at all. He comes down occasionally for a few days, and shoots as well as ever."

"How does he carry on both trades at once?" asked another of the party.

"Why, hang it all," said another, "all work and no play is deuced poor fun. I don't see why a parson shouldn't have some amusement sometimes as well as anybody else."

"Nor I," said Lord Staunton, "as long as he does his duty."

"I believe Rowley to be a most excellent young fellow," said mine host. "He is a curate in one of the most populous parts of London, and I'm told he does his work most conscientiously. I know he looks quite a different man after he has been down in the country for two or three days."

Egerton had not taken much interest in the individual in question, but when he drove up to the door next morning after breakfast, they recognised each other in a moment as having been at Cambridge together, and fraternised accordingly.

Rowley was dressed in a properly clerical

pepper-and-salt suit; and although he shot as well as any of the party, he continued to demean himself in every way as the most prudish of respectable rectors could have wished. So well indeed did he shoot, that more than one old stager said that it was the greatest pity to send so good a shot into the Church, and even condoled with him upon his hard fate. But as Rowley himself was perfectly satisfied with his lot, their condolences may possibly have seemed superfluous.

Egerton was not so good a shot by any means. Men who live in Leicestershire have a more exciting amusement to occupy their winter. And Harry began by missing rocketers one after another, to the great disgust of his host, who called out in a loud voice to the keeper to incline the beaters round the other way, and received his excuses very ungraciously at the end of the beat. What a bore it is shooting badly under the eye of a man who you know is marking every bird that goes away wagging its tail, and counting it one less to the bag!

Egerton knew very well that it was not so much because he was not a lord, as in consideration of his early misconduct, that he had been selected for the very worst position in the next beat.

The majority of the other guns were posted well at the end of the covert, where all the birds would get up, and where the greater part of the ground game would make for. But he, for his sins, was placed some way back from the corner, getting an occasional shot at an old jack hare that was trying to steal away; or at a rabbit that incautiously stopped to wink at him as he passed; or at some foolish young pheasant, perhaps, whose mother didn't know that it was out—being close under cover herself, with her person well concealed by the dry grass, digesting her morning meal of Indian corn and oats, and disinclined for the exertion of flight,—a habit of body much affected by pheasants which are brought up by hand.

The beaters draw nearer; the sound of their voices and the rattling of their sticks

is beginning to arouse the most languid of the birds. The ground inside the covert gradually becomes alive with many twinkling feet. Every tuft gives up its bird, every briar its rabbit, and the confused multitude goes scuttling along before Harry's expectant gun—all towards the end of the covert, taking no notice whatever of him as they pass. The rustling and the pit-a-pat going on inside would have been tantalising even to a stoic or a Job, and it is in vain that he picks out an occasional rabbit from between the legs of some gawky cock pheasant,—he can't persuade them to rise. At last, happy thought! an old cock stands blinking at him only half awake, not knowing which way to go, and wondering what it all means. He shoots him deliberately on the ground, and the effect was gratifying beyond his utmost hopes. Many others were taking the same line, and directly they came upon his prostrate corpse, up they got, and Harry, to his very great delight, sold the keeper by having some excellent sport till the beaters came up. The success of his ruse had put him into

good spirits and improved shooting, and he recovered his character a little with the head of the party when his heap of slain was observed.

Chuckling, he took his position in a better place next beat, and continued to bang away till the end of the day, notwithstanding the indescribable misery which each shot caused him for the last hour or so. Every one seemed to go right through his head, leaving a feeling of sickness and agony only to be endured for the sake of the bag. This is what is technically termed pleasure, according to the modern standard of sport.

He was rather pleased to find, when the list of game was brought in at dinner, that each gun's performances had not been accurately noted down, for the benefit of the general public. I'm not sure that it isn't, in fact, I am sure that it is, an unnecessary cruelty to an indifferent shot to have the game apportioned to each gun compared with his shots, and read out at dinner sometimes. The ladies look upon him as such a very poor man to be such a very poor per-

former; and when retiring under the table is such a very unusual course of procedure, it is questionable whether even his feeling of extreme humiliation would warrant the adoption of it.

They were to have a partridge drive next day, and the keenest of the party, therefore (our young clergyman among the number), went to bed without going to the smoking-room. The others, in deference to the evident anxiety of the master of the house, threw away the ends of their cigars not long after, and were soon sleeping the sleep of open-air exercise.

The guns are in their places; the beaters have gone round; the drive has begun. For some time the shooters smoke their pipes undisturbed, the beaters being still a long way off. Then a hare or two come galloping leisurely up, sit up on their hind legs, and listen, until rolled over by the nearest gun. Then a brace of old birds come skimming along, and first one and then the other falls on either side of some old hand. A covey follows, and then another, and another, and

the shooting becomes incessant as the birds come whishing past over their heads. Up to the present time Harry Egerton, sportsman, has bagged one brace exactly. He can't make out why it is they don't fall. He sees Rowley, who is next door to him, dropping them before and behind with the greatest precision. Odd! they wouldn't come down to him. It's just possible that he may have shot behind them, as this game of driving was one which he had never played before.

The circle of beaters is approaching, and the game comes thicker and thicker. Hares in mad bewilderment, scampering and stopping, turning and doubling; the air filled with the rush of wings, and the ground before and behind the line strewed with expiring feathers. The birds themselves are as excited as the guns; they don't know what all this hubbub means; and sometimes, in sheer perplexity, alight immediately in front of the line, until the noise of the approaching beaters makes them rise again. Over they come—bang—bang, and a brace

are left behind. Another gun, and another covey. Down they come, all strewed about the place; pick them up; count the total; and don't ask Egerton how many he claims.

So on again to another stand.

More covert shooting on the ensuing day, and Saturday ends the week, when Harry finds himself returning to London in company with Rowley, little thinking that that quiet curate was to form an important link in his future destiny.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT a charm there is about the pavements and streets of London towards the end of the month of November !—the muddy crossings, the sticky flags, the smoky atmosphere, the leaden sky, the drizzling rain, or that delightful yellow fog which gives such a cheerful tinge to everything, and reflects itself so pleasingly upon the human spirits ! The constitutional down Piccadilly, where strange dissolving views are to be seen for nothing on every side. Gaunt forms of weird-looking omnibuses come looming into view, tower above you for a moment, and are lost again in jaundiced night. Obscurity, at intervals, gives up a spectral cab which fades away into the murky shroud again, as soon as seen. Forms grow out distinct from the yellow wall, grow in again, and pass away.

Lamps, from the top of ghostly posts, send forth a sickly gleam ; and the cries of link-men break upon the ear like voices from some spirit world, as, now nearer and now farther, they rise and fall and die away, and rise again, and seem to mock and jeer around you, as you wander on still deeper into the gloom. You turn back at last, thoroughly oppressed, without and within; feel your way back to your club, and shut yourself up in a corner of the library, with the most rousing book which may be found; or, if melancholy has charms for you, take up something more in harmony with the genial prostration of your feelings, and dwell upon the utter misery, and discomfort, and wretchedness, of such weather in such a place. The man who can be cheerful in a real November fog, after a day or two of mild applications, varied with continuous rain, ought to be put in a glass case, or preserved in his own spirits.

Egerton had been buoyed up, when he returned to London, with the popular fallacy that in the winter London is much

more sociable; that from not being quite so common, he would be treated much more civilly, and would find plenty of dinner society taking the place of the crowded enjoyments of the season. But, up to the present time, he had certainly not found this to be the case. There was not a creature hardly in town that he knew. Houses all shut up—the society, as far as he could see, entirely legal and professional, and widows. None of the people who treated him with such becoming coldness in the summer, were there to embrace him with hospitable warmth in the winter. The hired brougham and the decaying family vehicle droned their monotonous course over unappreciating stones, and before weary eyes; and emptiness and dulness seemed to have settled upon the town. A few men he met in his daily wanderings, young guardsmen or others; and occasional birds of passage rested for a day or two to vary the monotony of his life.

But these mild excitements were not proof against continued fog and rain. Lower and lower sank his spirits, and on the third

morning of uninterrupted gloom, they fairly arrived at zero.

All his pecuniary difficulties, which were now, after a temporary lull, beginning to assert themselves again; his estrangement from his father; his monotonous inactivity of life; his hopeless prospects; his passionate and unexpressed love; every consideration which could in any way add to the cheerfulness of his spirits, rose up to comfort him on this gloomy morning, and impressed upon him (in order the better to carry out this benevolent design), that in his life he had never felt so utterly wretched before. The dripping of the rain outside, the solitude of the deserted room inside, the listless air of the occasional waiter, the darkness of the day,—all contributed their little mite of comfort. And it was in vain that he sought to change the dark current of his thoughts by turning over the pages of his betting-book, and trying to picture to himself what he should do if he won a thousand or two on next year's Derby. His father was continuing his hunting, as usual, in Leicestershire; and from

the accounts received periodically from Mrs. Greville or Maud, there seemed no prospect at present of the wind changing in that quarter. It was a pleasant life, truly; no interest beyond a betting-book; no prospect of any change from a profitless, aimless existence; no occupation but the study of the racing news or the calculation of odds; no hope; no ambition; no opening for energy, except one which might lead eventually to ruin,—the whole a dreary blank, a waste of hopelessness, with not a ray of light to relieve the darkness, or to bring out any little lurking hope. There was not even racing going on now to give him employment; and taking long prices about next year at Tattersall's was the only excitement to be procured.

Betting naturally brought him into the society of men of like habits and similar interests, and he hardly benefited by the companionship. It is all very well as long as it lasts, that light-come-light-go style in which the betting man, with his pocket full of notes one day, empty the next, throws his

money about. It is very pleasant, and free, and jovial, but it is not very desirable to acquire this very catching habit of indifference to money, if your pockets are likely to be more often empty than full. And so Egerton found.

It was beginning to strike him that his ready money would be very soon exhausted at his present rate of living—that he should have to dine cheaply, instead of washing down the delicacies of the season with his pint of champagne, &c. &c.; that he would have to forswear cabs, and cultivate various other annoying little economies which he had not thought much about of late, while his Newmarket winnings were still unexhausted. It was just possible, too, that he might run short of money altogether, and as he didn't fancy borrowing from friends, and there were very few people in London who were likely to give him dinner, his position under these circumstances would not be an agreeable one. The door opened upon the perplexity of his thoughts, and he looked up indifferently to see who it was.

"Tom, by Jove!"

"You scoundrel! who'd have thought of seeing you here?" exclaimed Manners, as they shook the cordial hand.

"My head-quarters now," Harry answered, with a faint attempt at a smile. "I'm awfully glad to see you, old boy. I was just thinking of committing suicide. Did you ever see such weather?"

It was not lively; Manners could agree with him so far. And he proceeded to explain, for Harry's information, that he had just come up for the day from his hunting-quarters with the Duke, where four of them had a capital little house, good cook, and lots of stabling. He had better come down to them. They could put him up very well.

"Got no horses, my dear Tom."

"Oh! get a couple of nags from here for a month. I'll mount you a couple of days."

This sounded pleasant; and as Harry thought he would be justified in making any sacrifice to get out of London, he agreed, after some further conversation, to go and

look about him for an animal or two, while Manners transacted his business.

"What's the odds?" he reasoned with himself. "It'll only be another bill to add to the lot. He won't want paying just yet, and I couldn't stand this kind of life much longer. Pay them all after the Derby, and it's just as well to get out of the way of duns."

In the evening they dined together, and Harry informed his friend that he had secured a couple of goodish-looking horses, and would be ready for him to-morrow if he liked.

"We'll go down to-morrow evening then," said Manners. "There's a sale at Tattersall's to-morrow I want to go to. Do you ever hunt from here?"

"Too expensive. Castleton gave me a mount with the Queen's the other day. That's the only time I've been out. We had a very good run too, for a wonder; the stag went like a bird, straight across country."

"You're sure of your run with stag-

hounds, which is something; but I don't call it sport. Ten to one, too, he takes you along the road for ever so many miles."

"Of course it doesn't come up to fox-hunting; it's only a drag, you may say, but it's the best of its sort near London. Harborough is a longish way to go, and so are the Pytchley."

"Yes, and who'd go all that way to be ridden over by a rabble of Cockneys? I went to a Crick meet once, and you'll not catch me at another in a hurry. They never give the fox a chance of getting away,—all over the place, surrounding the gorse, and seeming to think the game is to head him back into covert every time he shows his nose outside. Then, if he does manage to steal away, they override the hounds, and jump on you, and play old Harry with the whole concern. Defend me from Cockney sportsmen! With all your grass, I'd sooner have our country for sport. I believe you, my boy!" And tossing off the remainder of his glass to the Duke, Manners called for the bill, and suggested they should look in

at the Lyceum, where he heard that there were some fine women to be seen.

Egerton was agreeable, though he had been there only the night before. In fact, he had, during the last few nights, been the round of the theatres with different friends, having nothing else to do. Mr. Sams and Mr. Mitchell had shown a noble confidence in giving him unlimited credit for stalls, and these also he proposed to pay for after winning his *coup* on the next year's Derby. To whatever didn't absolutely require ready money, he considered it wise and provident invariably to extend that excellent system of credit, which is so very convenient and so very expensive.

The first object which attracted their attention on entering the theatre was the back of Castleton's head in the stall in front of them, where, with a brother officer on either side, he was going through a pantomimic exercise for the benefit of the first lady on the stage, who, from the looks which she directed ever and anon to this particular point, was apparently not entirely unknown

to the occupants of these stalls. The act was just over, and the curtain having fallen, Castleton feels his hair pulled from behind, and, turning sharply round, finds Manners' face grinning within a couple of inches of his own. Shaking of hands and interchange of how-d'ye-do's, general barter of information, and comments upon the physical development of the various actresses more particularly worthy of notice, fill up the interval till the curtain rises again. Then Manners takes a prolonged glance round the stalls and boxes, and communicates to Harry that there isn't a soul there that he knows.

"Never is, my dear fellow; there's not a creature in town. This sort of thing is all you see now;" and he indicated a bundle of reddish flesh, ornamented with corkscrew curls, which occupied one of the stalls in the row before them, the movement of whose fan caused the whole row to oscillate in really a very dangerous manner.

At the end of the piece they adjourn with Castleton and his friends to the Alhambra, for the ballet; and thence to the house of

one Mr. William Shaw, pugilist. Finding nothing going on there, they continue their tour of inspection, and smoke a cigar in the gaiety and *badinage* of Great Windmill Street, where Castleton is soon disporting himself in the mazy dance with some pink or velvet effrontery.

Egerton had long since given up resorts of this kind. The image of Blanche Villars would occur to his mind when his good-nature led him to accompany his friends to such places; and the contrast between her purity, innocence, and refinement, and the flaunting coarseness of the creatures by whom he was surrounded, would fill him with such a feeling of disgust that even the contact would be intolerable.

And yet some women think that the nearer they approach to the habits of this class, the more they give up all feminine grace, forswear their own sex, and take to the manners and customs of the other, the greater attraction they will have in men's eyes. But they make a vast mistake. No man feels any respect for a woman who smokes,

and bets, and swears, and delights in talking upon subjects which among modest women would call up a blush if merely hinted at. Even those men who do find amusement in the society of these deluded artificial monsters, have a lurking contempt for them in their hearts, and merely look upon them as amusing playthings, whom they would be very sorry to marry. The young ladies who glory in being thought "fast," and who find a charm in the undignified intercourse to which they are admitted with the other sex, would consult their own interests far better if they were to avoid laying themselves open to such criticism as might (if they could hear it) shock what little self-respect they still retain.

It may seem hard to the innocent that they should be sprinkled by the shower of contempt which these ugly spots in the sex have lately drawn down upon the women of the age; but as long as they don't set their faces more decidedly against the loud unfeminine tendency of the day, they have no right to complain. What right has any

woman to complain of being classed with coarseness and immodesty, who helped to swell the obscene crowd which nightly flocked last season to gaze with open-mouthed delight at the indecent exhibitions of a worn-out Phryne? Talk of the grossness of the last century indeed! Why, even Congreve's audience could not well have wished for anything stronger than this outrage upon what used to be called our English squeamishness. To see English mothers gloating, Messalina-like, over such a filthy performance, was a sight too repulsive to be witnessed a second time by anyone who wished to retain even a modicum of respect for those ladies,—who, if only from their position in society, had been before credited with at least a sense of *public* decency. There may be less license of expression in the present day; but the avidity with which nasty spectacles are run after by English ladies is not an evidence that any greater refinement of mind and feeling exists among the upper classes. However, where Domitian leads, the *respectable* world of course

will follow. And if it is true that genius is regulated by the laws of supply and demand, why we can hardly complain with any justice that good actors have almost died out in England. Good writers will go next—if they have not been already swamped by the literary filth in which the public, the novel-reading public, delight to wallow. How it sickens one sometimes with human nature to see how closely it is allied at one extreme with that of devils; and the connection is continually being thrust upon us now, thanks to those delicious works by which some authors seek to bring down to their own base level the rest of their kind.

Writers of virtuous novels were sneered at the other day, by some godly critic, for finding fault with vicious literature. It is humiliating to think that one is so eaten up with jealousy as positively not to be able to see the advantages which society derives from immoral novels. But if the confession should afford that critic an opportunity for being a little smart, of making a little hit which it will be a satisfaction to him to

think over afterwards, it will not have been made in vain. One likes to give pleasure to as many people as possible; and it is always such a gratification to a small mind to be able to raise a smile even at the expense of morality, if it thinks that by so doing it will help on its own struggling character for wit.

CHAPTER VIII.

"GOING for one hundred and twenty!—for one hundred and twenty; going!" and Mr. Edmund Tattersall holds up his hammer and looks round the crowd of bidders once more. Manners takes another look at the horse, which is being trotted up and down for the inspection of the yard, nods to the auctioneer, and the hammer is lowered. "Guineas,—one hundred and twenty guineas only offered for this horse!—going for one hundred and twenty guineas!" and the hammer descends with a rap upon the desk. The next horse is brought out, and Manners is credited with a couple out of the lot. Having promised to mount Egerton two days in the week, he would require another horse or two to do it comfortably. He had,

therefore, with the reckless good-nature which characterised him, bought a couple which he knew something about, giving Harry to understand that he was only making up his complement, and had given orders to his servant to take them down with the other hired two that evening.

They adjourn to the betting-room for a few moments, and Harry is an object of interest directly he enters the room. One leviathan after another comes up to him, betting-book and pencil in hand, and asks what he wants to do. Would he back one? They were prepared to lay long prices against outsiders, and could accommodate him, in fact, in any way he liked. But Egerton merely wished to hear how things were going, just took a thousand to ten once about a likely outsider, and then strolled out again, leaving the book-makers to continue their clamour to other noble patrons of the turf, backers of horses.

In the evening he was on his way to Manners' hunting quarters; and, the next day, out with the green liveries of the Duke,

enjoying the contrast which the country and hunting presented to the gloom of London.

They had a comfortable bachelor *ménage* in the heart of the country, and Egerton could and would have stayed there with much satisfaction for the natural term for which he had engaged his horses.

But, unfortunately, when barely a fortnight of the term had expired, that arch enemy of hunting men, Jack Frost, Esq., came down into the country, bringing with him all his establishment of snow and ice, and bitter winds, with the evident intention of making a long stay. For a few days he was vigorously resisted; but finally asserted himself so completely, that bachelor establishments were broken up, and, one after another, their occupants turned tail and made for London. Numerous other hunting boxes sent contributions, and London streets were filled with unfortunate men thrown out of amusement, who mooned about the streets day and night with *ennui* on their faces.

To a man who is obliged to live in

London during the winter, a frost is quite a godsend, for his friends turn up at every corner, and the place actually assumes a frequented appearance again.

Every rose, however, has its thorn, and the hordes of itinerant working men who infest the quiet streets in such weather, with their monotonous assurances that they *are* poor working men, who've got no work to do, produce a more than counterbalancing irritation in the mind. It is rather hard that organ-grinders, and street-singers, and purveyors of wares in baskets should give quiet people in quiet streets all the benefit of their discordant harmony,—*nec cogitandi nec quiescendi locus est.* If you leave the more frequented streets, with their roaring omnibuses and rattling cabs, and retire to an offshoot, you are entertained morning, noon, and night with every variety of musical instrument, sometimes alone, sometimes in parties, singing men and singing women, hymns and spiritual songs, varied by the prolonged agony of a costermonger's call, or the monotonous "old clo'" of some

elderly Israelite. It's a wonder how the irritable race of authors live through it all. The half-formed thought is nipped in the bud, the well-rounded period (intended) becomes a jagged platitude, the ideas lose their continuity, the imagination refuses its office, sentences cease to cohere, and you pace up and down the room in impotent fury—giving them money to go away of course only insures a fresh relay on the following day. It is to be hoped that a reformed Parliament may show its sense of the important trust which has been committed to it, and endeavour to ameliorate the condition of quiet people in this respect. Why in heaven's name should one be obliged to submit tamely to such a peripatetic infliction as that would-be Indian, whom, I dare say, many will recognise, who beats a tattoo with his fingers upon a sort of barrel drum, accompanying this fiendish invention for the destruction of the human temper with a dirge-like chant, innocent of tune, meaning, or harmony of any conceivable kind,—five consecutive minutes of which is

as great a torture as one would wish to inflict upon one's worst enemy? A hurdy-gurdy is heavenly music compared with this drum. It is worse even than the strawberry-men on Sunday mornings in the summer. Deep melancholy bass, cracked treble, and contralto then mingle their several notes to relieve the surrounding silence, and keep up a continuous chain of irritation, which is sufficiently trying. It is useless to throw your dressing-gown into the form of a toga, and quote Cicero with much dignity from the window, "*Quousque tandem*," &c.; they don't understand Latin, and ask if you want to buy,—fresh this morning. You make an angry gesture of dissent, and the cry is continued up the street,—grows fainter and fainter, and the echoes gradually die away round a distant corner, when you fancy the agony is past, and settle down again to your book,—and at that moment "fine str-a-a-a-w-berries! fine fresh str-a-a-a-wberries!" breaks upon the despairing ear, from the powerful and obnoxious lungs of some female vendor who has just

arrived upon the scene. It's a weary life—ask Mr. Babbage if it isn't.

Our recollected irritation has carried us off from Egerton and his party, who had just arrived in London, finding the Serpentine frozen over, and the world talking about skating prospects.

London altogether looked more lively than when Harry left. There was a perceptible improvement in the carriages. The holidays were beginning, and it was near Christmas time, so that big boys and little boys were airing their holiday costumes about the streets, in expectation of the coming pantomimes. Many ladies, too, were in town looking out Christmas presents, and the materials for Christmas trees for their children in the country; and there was quite a business-like bustle about the place, which was an agreeable change from the dull monotony of November emptiness.

Harry found a letter from Maud awaiting him, intrusting to his judgment the choice of a doll for little Constance Greville; giving

him an account of a brilliant run they had had from Ranksborough Gorse—made more brilliant to her by the admiration which she had elicited for jumping the Whissendine at a place where two or three others who followed her had got hopeless duckings; sending him much love from her mother, who hoped that he was not betting or gambling, or doing anything foolish. Nothing new about his father, except that he had lamed his favourite hunter. Philip was down there. "And do you know," Maud said, "he has been saying such *odd* things about you, Harry, lately. He talks about you sometimes as if you were not his brother, —as if you had nothing to do with us. And he is always saying more unkind things now even than he used to about you. I can't think what he means. He frightened mamma so dreadfully one day, by something he said when I was out of the room, that she nearly fainted, and told me to be sure and say nothing about it to Uncle Philip. And she seems quite afraid of him now. It is so uncomfortable, all this. Do tell me what

you've said or done to him, that he should go on so strangely."

"What *I*'ve done to him!" echoed Harry, as he read; "why what can she mean? I've only spoken a couple of words to him since I came back to London!"

And then he read this part of the letter over again. His aunt's conduct, too,—strange! and he fell into a fit of musing.

His thoughts will not go very far to elucidate the mystery of Philip's behaviour; but if we go back a little in the course of events, we may find a partial explanation.

Philip Egerton had eagerly counted the days, and almost the hours, to the time of his appointment with Mr. Flint, attorney. And what was his dismay, on arriving again at that gentleman's door, to find the house shut up, and to be told by the old woman who opened it, that her master had had a fit two days before, and died almost immediately afterwards.

His mortification choked him for a few moments. This secret just within his reach,

and now to slip from his grasp in this tantalising manner!

"It's a lie!" he cried. "I don't believe a word of it."

"Highty-tighty!" exclaimed the woman, "who be you, I'd like to know, to call other folks liars? Keep a civil tongue in your head, master, will 'ee?"

"Is his body in the house?" asked Philip, angrily, without noticing her indignation. "Let me see it."

"Drat your imperence!" cried the other, "what call 'ud the likes of you have to see his body, or anyone else's body? You bean't the undertaker, I don't suppose;" and therewith she slammed the door in his face, and put an end to further conversation.

Gnashing his teeth with impotent rage, Philip entered his cab again, and had driven half-way towards the West End, when he stopped the man, and told him to drive back and find the registry office of deaths for that district.

No use, Philip. He was dead, sure enough, and had carried his secret with him,

as far as you were concerned. But stop; there was another man there when he had first called,—a partner, perhaps, or confidential clerk. Why had he not spoken more civilly to that hag of a woman at the door? —useless going back there again now.

Ah! a detective, presently he thought; he would ferret him out; would want paying, certainly, and it might not be worth anything after all. But curiosity, and the hope of advantage or revenge, overcame the not altogether secondary feeling of thrift, and for the next day or two Philip was busy with the good work which he had taken in hand.

He didn't consider it necessary to confide to his agent the purport of the secret which he had reason to believe this man might have held in common with the other. He merely wanted him to be found, and to know whether there had been any confidence between them. If there had, he should then be able to deal with him himself.

Having made his arrangements, Philip left town in full confidence of success, and

hugging himself upon the prospect of displacing Harry from his father's affections entirely, he could not forbear occasionally to hint ambiguously at the catastrophe which his over-confidence led him to believe was all but imminent. During this time Philip's spirits were higher than they had ever been known to be, and he was almost jocose, at times, when he thought over his cleverness and the result which was to ensue. He didn't, however, despise the smaller means which were always at his command, of prejudicing his father against Harry. The only difference was, that his insinuations and ill-natured comments were more open now that events seemed to promise no further necessity for the concealment of his hostility and hatred of that person who had hitherto been known as his brother. It didn't much concern him to think what his real condition might be. If it had ever occurred to him to fancy Harry in a better position than himself (thanks to the kind efforts he was making in his behalf), he would almost have put an end to his existence rather than endure the envy,

and disappointment, and rage with which such a thought would have filled his heart.

He had artfully extracted from Mrs. Greville all the particulars of Harry's birth and childhood, but made nothing much out of them for Mr. Egerton had gone abroad so very soon after his wife's death, that Mrs. Greville knew very little about that period of his life. What she did know she seemed loth to dwell upon, and when Philip had one day hinted rather more than he intended as to the object of his inquiries, she had, as Maud said, almost fainted at the mention of it, and looked wildly at him for some further explanation, which Philip, drawing in his horns at once, had no intention, just at present, of giving.

Matters were in this state when Maud had written to Harry, and, for all the assistance he could give in the way of explanation, they were likely to remain in that state.

Meantime, he executed her commission for Constance with great judgment and taste, and would have added other presents

of his own to the parcel, only that his affairs, just at the present time, were in a truly critical condition. One of his creditors had seen fit to take a long farewell of this troubled scene of pecuniary embarrassments, and his inopportune decease had been followed by the ordinary lawyer's application for the settlement of all outstanding accounts. This, on Egerton's not replying (for he had given no address on leaving town), was followed by an ultimatum, and then a writ.

It was more than inconsiderate, Harry thought; it was a positively mean advantage for the man to take, to die at this inconvenient moment. There was a want of feeling evidenced in the whole transaction, which jarred most unpleasantly upon his pocket, and he began to think the creditor a more abandoned race than even they had appeared in his eyes before.

To aggravate the utter indelicacy of the whole proceeding, the ingenious lawyer had managed to track him to his lodgings, notwithstanding that strict orders had been

given to the porter at the club, and the servants at his father's house, to give no address or information whatever about him.

The very annoying result of their presumed negligence was, that the writ was delivered to him at his rooms, and it became an absolute necessity to settle the account, with the extravagant charges for lawyer's expenses. A change of lodgings might have afforded a temporary respite; but then he owed some weeks' rent for his present ones, and therefore a change was out of the question. The account had to be paid, and his funds were reduced to a minimum.

It was hard to think very dutifully of his father as he contemplated his prospects, and saw nothing for it but to rush recklessly into any course which promised to bring in funds. The fifth commandment stuck in his throat rather at this time.

A rubber of whist in the evening, after an economical dinner, gave him as much excitement for the small stakes in which he played, as he had ever felt at any other time when playing for twenty times the amount.

Fortune, however, was kind, and added a shilling or two for next day's dinner.

"What the deuce is a fellow to do?" he said to Manners, as they came out from Pratt's the following afternoon. "Isn't there any way of raising money? Can't you insure your life? My life must be a very valuable one,—they ought to give me a lot of money on it."

Manners laughed; didn't know much about it; believed they wanted good substantial security.

Harry thought over all his relations, and questioned whether any of them would be likely to do it for him. Probably not; they thought him such an extravagant beggar,—and then he couldn't stand being refused. So the idea had to be given up.

"But I must get some money somehow," he said; "this sort of thing can't go on, you know."

Manners again offered to lend him any money he wanted, or he would even back a bill for him, if he liked, to any reasonable amount.

"Wouldn't for the world, old boy," said Egerton. "Much obliged all the same. I have a horror of bills. Besides, I shouldn't be more able to pay up at the end of three months than I am now. I must plunge on the Derby, that's very evident. But that's such a deuce of a long way off. It doesn't help one much for the present."

Tom said that he had better let him lend him some money for the present, at all events. But Egerton stoutly refused. He should have no way of repaying it.

"What does that matter?" indignantly suggested his good-natured friend.

Harry told him that he was the best fellow going, and promised, when he was actually reduced to his last coin, to get him to lend a couple of sovereigns to go on with. And the idea seemed so ludicrous, that he should actually be in danger of starvation, that he burst out laughing, and was quite merry over the notion.

"What a mistake it is," he said, "people not being able to get along without money. There must be something radically wrong,

you know, in society, that I should be reduced to the condition of an absolute pauper. You're going into Parliament, Tom; suppose you introduce a bill for the proper support of needy and deserving younger sons. The country really ought to provide for such useful members of society."

Not a doubt of it, Manners thought—they were shamefully treated. "I never had a younger brother to my name," he said, "so he can't abuse me for being born before him."

"It's always the fellows who don't know how to spend money who have it. Look at my brother,—he'll never spend a penny more than he does now, and that isn't much. Whereas, if I were to come in by chance for ten thousand or so a-year, I think I should be able to find some way of getting through it."

Talking of coming into money reminded Harry that there was a paltry twenty thousand pounds coming to him at some future time. And the idea now presented itself that it might be possible to raise money on this. Query, though, was it settled? and if

not, would the intention be of any use to him?

The family solicitor was the man to answer this question, and regardless of the fact that he had but a few shillings of property in the world, a Hansom is called, and he is soon rattling down the Strand in the direction of Lincoln's Inn.

The bare chance of an opening towards a few hundreds of ready money gave him a thrill of excitement which was worth enjoying, even at the expense of subsequent disappointment.

A law-eaten clerk, in rusty black and dirty wristbands, opened the door to his knock, and pointed with his pen to an inner room. Here, grimly spectacled, sat that man of deeds, Mr. Naylor Bond, surrounded by tin boxes with large-lettered names, parchments strewed about the floor, musty documents and red tape peeping from odd corners; law-books, pens and wicker baskets occupying the table.

Harry informed him that he was his father's son, and was rather disappointed to

find that he didn't seem in the least interested by the announcement. He merely requested him to take a seat, listened calmly to what he had to say, and then dashed out his flickering hope at once, by informing him that he believed there had been some such understanding as he mentioned at the time of his father's marriage, but that there was no deed of any kind which would give him a legal right or title to the money, or upon which he could raise funds to meet his present exigencies. There had been no settlements made, and therefore, without something to show which would prove his claim, he was afraid that in that little town of London there would not be found any confiding individual to advance him money upon merely hypothetical security. After a little further conversation, which only proved to him yet further the hopelessness of raising money by any means without security such as he had not at command, Harry apologised for having taken up the man of law's time, and wandered back along the Strand in a very unenviable state of mind,

jostled under the flaring gas-light by hurrying lawyers and men of business, dirty women and newspaper boys. The destruction of his temporary hope only left him more despondent than ever. He thought it was a very weary world, and that he was the most persecuted and unfortunate and miserable being in it. The Bankruptcy Court again suggested itself, but was discarded as an undignified way of evading his creditors. "Seems as if one wanted to do the beggars out of their money," he thought; "wouldn't my father be savage, too? As far as that goes, though, he can't expect me to respect his feelings much when he treats one like this." He thought it was almost enough to make him hate his own father, being driven into a corner as he was. "I expect I shall turn fiend," he said to himself, "if this goes on. He's trying very hard to send me to the bad, and seems very likely to succeed."

He tried to stifle the angry feelings which in the bitterness of his spirit were rising in his mind, and inwardly prayed that he never

might become so utterly bad as to curse his own father, to whatever evil he might be brought by what he considered his ill-treatment. And then a ripple of feeling rose from his heart as he thought how his father used to make a companion of him, and how, even in his irritable moods, he had treated him with kindness and affection; and he wandered gloomily along into Pall Mall, taking no notice of the passers-by, wrapped in his own despondent thoughts.

The door of Mr. Egerton's study has just at this time closed upon the stealthy tread of Philip Egerton. He had made an excuse of business to have an interview with his father, his real object being to communicate artfully a fact which had come to his ears that afternoon, out of which he thought there was some capital to be made. A man had told him that Harry had been hunting with the Duke, and Philip Egerton had heard the news with satisfaction—of course he was delighted to hear that Harry was enjoying himself. But having casually mentioned the fact to his father, he proceeded to deplore the recklessness which

seemed to stop at no extravagance, took it for granted that he had had a regular stud of hunters there—it was just like him, and he had never told him when they met that he was going down there—he supposed that he didn't care about his father hearing of it. Philip Egerton was quite sorry to see such utter want of principle; he thought his father was very much to be commended for not cutting him adrift altogether, he would have perfectly deserved it.

As Mr. Egerton didn't enter, he thought, so cordially as usual into his views this afternoon, Philip brought his visit gradually to an end.

His father, in fact, had gazed into the fire the greater part of the time while he had been speaking, only evincing interest now and then by short exclamations, denoting impatience rather than any other feeling; and Philip, as he crept along the hall, wore an expression of doubt upon his face, which seemed to imply that he feared his remarks might not have had the effect which he desired.

For the last few days there had been no hunting, and Mr. Egerton had kept very much to his own room, and seen a good deal of his own company in consequence. The want of amusement had brought about a corresponding depression of spirits, which made his own thoughts no very stimulating food. He had felt the want of something to cheer and brighten the house in that cold weather, when he was obliged to stay so much in-doors, and Philip did not fill the blank which he felt more perceptibly every day.

"Philip hasn't much feeling," he said to himself, as the door closed behind that wily gentleman; "I don't like to see a man hit when he's down. He's bad enough without being made worse by his own brother;" and he poked the fire nervously, and relapsed again into his arm-chair; took up his book, and tried to read.

But his thoughts were far away, and though the book was still held before him, his eyes were looking past it into the fire.

"Could it be possible that she was right?"

he murmured, and remained lost for a moment or two in the consideration of such a possibility, then resumed his book with an impatient movement, and read half a page or so, without taking in the meaning of a single word.

Again it was put down, and Mr. Egerton heaved a regretful sigh as he looked into the fire, and saw but one face among the coals.

"Can't give in now," he said, half aloud. "It would never do to be inconsistent. What a fool I was to lose my temper and my reason as I did! I might have known that I couldn't do without him."

"Well, well, it is too late now," he continued, after another pause, and with another sigh he turned again to his book.

A moment afterwards he threw it down with a sudden impulse. "That shall be done at all events!" he said, as he rose from his chair, and proceeded to the writing-table.

He had determined that Harry's interest in his mother's fortune should be secured in

the event of his death; and he now began a letter to his solicitor, requesting that a deed to that effect might be prepared forthwith.

The letter was still in progress, when his attention was distracted by the entrance of his servant to say that the stud groom was waiting to see him. He laid down his pen, and the letter was never finished.

CHAPTER IX.

It was not very long before Harry Egerton had to fulfil his promise of applying to Manners when he was absolutely reduced to destitution. Bills and lawyers' letters came dropping in with unpleasant frequency, and some of them had to be met.

He fully intended, when his next quarter's allowance came in, to repay what money had been lent to him. But he found at that time so many more pressing claims upon his limited funds, that he was obliged to defer it indefinitely with other similar debts incurred in the meantime. The habit of borrowing had soon lost its disagreeable features after a little practice, and owing money to friends came to seem quite natural at last.

Christmas time, as everybody knows, is the gay season of duns. With a delicate attention which is most gratifying, they then distribute their congratulatory notes, and the compliments of the season, to all parts of the country; and their little missives darken the air of many a youthful room, as they shower down upon the breakfast-table like flies upon the summer marmalade.

Christmas in London requires some little amenities of this nature to counteract what might be called its dulness.

The blank desolation which taints the air of the clubs on Christmas Day, the utter desertion of the coffee-room, and the empty streets, where you are an object of unusual interest to every passing cab, have a very cheering effect upon the ordinary nature. And if there is only a little fog or rain to give an extra lively appearance to the town, the day may be really very much enjoyed in wandering about the deserted streets; quite a merry Christmas you may have, all of your own providing too.

The world, such part of it as was stationary in London, was flocking daily to the water in the different parks; and thither Harry, too, on this Christmas afternoon, bent his steps, skates in hand. Not that there was very much fun in revolving round the little circles which were cleared from the ruck of skaters and sliders. But being about the only man left in London (he thought he was the only one), and therefore having no one to go down with to Virginia Water, or Kingsbury, or any of the less frequented resorts of the skating world, he had (as they say in the provinces) to lump it.

The Skating Club had their tents erected on the banks of the Serpentine (the particular sheet of water which he favoured), and were gratifying themselves by attracting a little crowd to look on at their graceful intersections. Innumerable cads were sailing down long slides in long lines, and many men and many chairs were at Harry's service as he approached. The scene was gay enough, and the air was fresh, and the

small boys' laughter was merry, and the general enjoyment and rapid motion had a beneficial effect even upon his dispirited mind. An odd hunting acquaintance, too, there was, who had no fixed residence upon earth, and who was able to do something else besides hunt. Happy man! That creature of one idea little thinks how much enjoyment in life he loses by wrapping himself up in one pursuit. He doesn't, however, deserve very much sympathy, for he has none to give away. He is the most narrow-minded and illiberal of mortals. His selfishness is a nuisance to himself, and a nuisance to the world.

Look at the hunting-man in the summer, the cricketing-man in the winter, the young lady or young gentleman of balls out of the season or the whirl of fashionable life, how bored they look, and what bores they are in society. They haven't an idea to exchange, except about their own particular hobby, though upon the several points of this animal they will go on for ever if you let them, ride him backwards and forwards over

you, and gallop him to death for your benefit, thinking that the exhibition cannot fail to amuse you.

Some hobbies, of course, are very noble animals, fit to be trotted out before a world; but even the owners of these ought to keep a hack or two to ride in general society.

Returning from the Serpentine, Egerton was overjoyed to catch a glimpse of Lady Belvedere's liveries turning out of the Park. He had not known before that she was in town. There was no way of finding out at this time of year who *was* in town. But her appearance at the present juncture was particularly opportune,—she would probably be good for a dinner; and as his club was being turned inside out for the annual servants' ball, and no dinner therefore practicable there, the sight of her carriage was in every way a gratifying one.

His skates were soon deposited at his lodgings, and he himself at Lady Belvedere's knocker. The door is opened by that barrel of flesh—that thing called a porter—a creature whose life is passed in a comfortable

hooded chair, and whose exercise is confined to the few yards intervening between said chair and the door. No wonder then that his somewhat prescribed sphere of action should beget a pompous inflation, and induce him to encroach beyond the limits of his natural station.

From porter to butler, from butler to footman (this looked well for dinner-establishment in town), he is handed on to Lady Belvedere's boudoir. My lady would be down directly.

Good. His engagements were not pressing. He could wait. And he amuses himself, therefore, in the meantime, with the various *objets de vertu* which were scattered in profusion about the room. Ladies certainly do make their boudoirs charming little snuggeries of refinement and comfort. There were chairs for the eye and chairs for the person, chairs on which the old maid might have sat upright and correct in all the primness of her spinstership; chairs to show off the ease and elegance of the *dégagée* young married woman; *prie-dieux* for toast-

ing the toes upon the worked fender-stool; arm-chairs, from whose seductive embrace endless gossip and scandal might issue, and which gentlemen might sit in without leaving tell-tale creases in the chintz. The quaint patterned fire-irons and fender shone like silver; the chimney-piece was hidden with or-molu ornaments of curious device, fire-screens and knick-knacks of every kind. Winter curtains of warm tint drooped around a most cosy recess of cushioned ease. Choice flowers from the country perfumed the room in choice vases. Mirrors and Madonnas, coroneted blotting-book, and table ornaments, crucifixes, the latest novel, and the usual piece of work which gives a relish for conversation, and for that reason, I suppose, is never finished. Panelled walls, and occasional profane pictures, such as any landscape painter might copy; shaded lamps, and, by the bright clear fire, the neatest little silver tea-tray, holding a fanciful set of china tea-things, on a little three-legged table. All the little details of the room bespoke ease, luxury, and comfort,

and the *Court Journal* and *Morning Post*, which lay on the table, would have added fashion.

Harry was beginning to think how much pleasanter it would be to have such a room to come to always before dinner, instead of turning in to the club and its evening papers and crowd of men. He was picturing to himself the charming *tête-à-têtes* which he could have with some one he knew in such a paradise of cosy comfort,—when they would be at home to no one, and would sit by each other's side, and talk of nothing but each other. He could fancy her in that low chair before the fire, or sitting on the rug, as he had often seen her at home, and looking up at him from the depths of those loving blue eyes; and a bachelor's life seemed very hard and coarse and rough when placed by the side of such a picture.

Fortunately the entrance of Lady Belvedere disturbed his sentimental dream before it faded away into hopeless distance.

"How do you do, Henry!" she said, holding out her hand, as if they had met every day for some months past. Lady Belvedere was such a perfectly well-bred woman—I believe that to be the correct expression—that, even if the house had been on fire, she would not have exhibited any emotion of surprise. For the best of reasons, too—because she had no longer the power of experiencing such emotions. Her faculty of interest had served such a long apprenticeship to the ever-varying world that it was used-up, dull, languid, powerless. All the little incidents of life which would have stirred at once the unused nerves of the raw school girl or the young man from the country, were to her but bubbles on the whirling stream. That calm unimpressionable manner which is so often ridiculed as a *nil admirari* affectation, is the natural result of a cosmopolitan experience rather than the illegitimate offspring of an artificial restraint.

Harry had not lived so long in the world,

and he showed accordingly that he was glad to have discovered his aunt in London. How long had she been there?

Lady Belvedere had been some days in town; had come up to be near her doctor. "They say London is much warmer than the country in winter. But anything like the cold to-day I never felt. Isn't the room very cold?" And her ladyship shrugged her shoulders shiveringly at the thought of what she had gone through, and poured out a cup of tea. "Will you have some tea? If you ring the bell, they'll bring another cup. And what are you doing in town now? Why are you not hunting? I thought you young men were always hunting at this time of the year."

Harry reminded her that he and his father were not on visiting terms.

"Dear me!—to be sure, yes, I forgot. Why didn't you write to me?—you might have come down to Belvedere. He's a queer man, your father. And what are you doing?"

"Nothing, simply."

"But that's very bad for you. You'll be getting into all sorts of mischief."

"Yes, I know it's very bad for me. But how can I help it, my dear aunt?"

"And you were very extravagant,—were you? Young men will be young men, I suppose. And how long have you been in town?"

"Off and on, since the middle of October. I was down with the Villars' for some time, and then in Norfolk for a few days' shooting; and hunting with the Duke, till the frost set in."

"Well, come, you've done pretty well,—haven't you? And so you were down at Mottistone?—did Lady Mary ask you? It was very rash of her. And you and the daughter were riding across country together, I heard."

"Who did you hear that from?" asked Harry, getting unnecessarily red.

"A little bird came and told me. You must take care, you know, or you'll be committing yourself. She's a very charming girl, but there isn't any money."

Harry didn't know anything about her money, and seemed rather angry at the worldly point of view in which his aunt looked upon matrimony, but he pretended to be entirely interested in finding out who her informant could have been, and failing that, carried off the conversation to Norfolk, and mentioned what friends of hers he had met there.

"Oh, Lord Staunton is a very old friend of mine," said Lady Belvedere. "They are all coming to me, I hope, next month. You must come down, too, for the county ball,—you shall meet Miss Grant. You ought to make up to *her* now,—six thousand a year, and a place in the country!"

Harry was very willing to go to Belvedere, but he was not so ready to acquiesce in the heiress. He didn't think he could stand her as a wife even for six thousand a year.

"Don't be too sure that she'd have you!" Lady Belvedere said; "she has refused two or three already. Lord —— was dying to marry her, and she wouldn't have anything to say to him,—a marquis, and all. But

now tell me some news. I hear the Duftons' ball was a great success; they had a charming party in the house."

"Not enough men, I heard," replied Harry, who, when required, could discuss the latest gossip of the town as well as others, though he didn't make it his business in life to go about picking up scraps of news to retail to dowagers and scandal-mongers. Young men of the latter nature, who know everyone's antecedents—who everyone was before she was married, how So-and-so comes to be connected with So-and-so, the exact relationship of everybody to everybody else (not, of course, the people whom "nobody knows")—these young persons (and there are many old ones of the same kind) are, no doubt, very useful members of society, for they contribute to the enjoyment of dowager life. But their exceptional power in this respect creates a standard of agreeability by which their fellow-men shall be judged, which is rather unfair to those who have not the same capacity for the retention of odds and ends of scandal; who don't

convert their brains into a reach-me-down shop, where every article of news or gossip picked up in the day is carefully hung up within reach, so as to be unhooked and displayed at a moment's notice. The male mind usually takes no particular notice of the little chips of intelligence which he stumbles across in his daily walks; and accordingly, when he finds himself asked for news (as he always does in a London drawing-room), he has to hark back laboriously over the day's experience, to see what he has taken in which may come under that head.

The lady's man, on the contrary, goes from club to club, and from friend to friend, like the busy bee gathering honey from every flower, and stores away in his little, empty head every particle of gossip which he can extract—sorts it carefully, reserving the more highly flavoured for widows and single ladies, and so has it all ready to hand directly it is required. Who would wish to deprive the little thing of its reward in the prurient welcome of its audience, and the

feeling of satisfaction and importance with which it distils its babbling stream into their listening ears? Having exhausted himself at one house, and taken in what additional matter was to be gleaned there, he trots on with his little budget to his next visit, full of the most delightful self-complacency, and encouraged by the consciousness of the elevated sphere of usefulness in which his talents are being employed. Foolish persons who don't appreciate him have been known to say that there was something grandly contemptible in the sight of a man—a creature born to noble ends—occupying his life in gratifying the frivolous appetites of gossip-mongering females. But then, of course, they *were* foolish persons who did *not* appreciate him. Egerton might have been one of those persons, perhaps; but if he was, he was doing the very thing now which he affected to despise. Once in a way, I suppose, he thought it was all very well; and he continued for a long time to receive and impart and discuss bits of gossip and news and scandal. The latest *on*

dits—the composition of different parties at different country houses—who was going to be married, and how it came about—why such a marriage was not coming off—how people said that Lord So-and-so was going to separate from his wife, and how Lady Belvedere heard that the way she went on at such a place with some other man was quite scandalous. "They say *his* wife actually burst into tears before the whole room, which was very silly of her."

"Oh! she's always flirting with somebody," Harry said, alluding to the first-mentioned female.

"There are some queer stories about her before her marriage," said Lady Belvedere. "It's my belief that they were not married a day too soon. Did you hear that Lord M—— is not expected to recover? What ducks and drakes that wild young son of his will make with the property!"

Their family affairs are then discussed in detail; and where there was a character to be taken away, Lady Belvedere availed herself of the opportunity with the most per-

fect matter-of-fact good-nature. Was there anybody in town? Oh! she had seen So-and-so, and So-and-so; but people didn't come to town to stay much at this time of the year. Did Harry go to the play often? She heard that that foreigner was good; and so on, &c., &c., till it was time for him to go and dress for dinner.

Naturally, after so much gossip, he was going to dine with her.

And—gratifying thought!—whenever he was not dining elsewhere, he might repeat the dinner as long as she remained in town. This, and a cheque for fifty pounds, which he carried away with him that evening, was a pleasant wind-up to a dull Christmas-day. And as he walked gingerly home along the frozen streets, it seemed to him that a rosy tinge was breaking o'er his fortunes again.

Lady Belvedere was to have a large party in the ensuing month for the county ball and other festivities; and as she had dwelt at some length upon the attractions of Cornelia Grant, and the advantage of marrying an heiress in Harry's present position,

he couldn't help thinking for a moment what a relief it would be to get rid of all his difficulties, and whether such relief would not be worth purchasing at any price. But then another image rose before his mind, and all his former thoughts were scattered in a moment to the frosty air.

CHAPTER X.

It was a bitter winter. Far on into January, snow, frost, and biting winds brought cold, hunger, and starvation to many a homeless wretch. Shivering bundles of peripatetic rags cowered from the blast at the corners of streets and squares, or sought a temporary shelter beneath some friendly portico until dislodged by less friendly plush.

The piteous appeals which followed his mistress down the steps, as she swept past into her comfortable carriage, provoked no response or feeling of compassion in the hard heart of the woman of the world. Beggars! —tiresome beggars! The word only meant a nuisance to her ear. What did she know of the misery, the wretchedness of despair, the craving hunger, and the maddening cold which often make up the beggar? She has

been told never to give to people in the street, and so she wraps herself in a mantle of accommodating principle, and passes on. But she does not for that reason contribute more largely to the recognised societies for the relief of distress. Oh, no!—she has too many claims upon her purse when asked to support charity which is not discountenanced. And therefore, under the garb of obedience to a principle, she has the satisfaction of laying by a little additional fund for her own gratification. Pauperism, idleness, and imposition shall never be encouraged by her; and here, at least, virtue will be its own reward. How pleasant a thing is virtue, and how easy to practise, when the observance of it is synonymous with the furtherance of our own interests!

But if streets and squares were dotted with rags and starvation in this frost-bitten month of January, what sights were to be seen in the courts and alleys of the East End? There were houses filled with famished, half-clothed wretches, some who had been for days without food, some in the last

stages of fever, and other diseases brought on by want of nourishment. Moaning, crying, cursing their fate, and sometimes their God, as they looked on at their children dying in their arms, while they were starving themselves, and powerless to help. In one room might be seen a dead child on the floor, the mother, famished and shrunk to a skeleton, lying on the wooden bed at her last gasp, and the father, with hollow cheeks and staring eyes, trying in vain to quiet the clamours for bread which came from the almost naked children who survived. Such sights were common enough to the visitors, who, scanty in number, passed among them, dispensing such relief as the limited generosity of the public had placed at their disposal. Some few there were who had voluntarily surrendered the world for the time being, and from motives of pure philanthropy had come down to live among this poverty, and dirt and sickness, to do what they could for the alleviation of the anguish and despair which met them at every step. The attachment with which they were re-

garded by the poor wretches amongst whom they moved may have been some reward; it was assuredly well earned if it was. The lines are not fallen unto them in pleasant places who undertake this kind of work. And yet there were young men of ball-rooms, too, to be seen visiting from house to house, dispensing the funds of relief-committees and other societies. Young men who would probably have blushed to have their good deeds known to the world in which they moved, where such feelings of humanity are stifled by cold conventionality, and bring ridicule rather than credit to the possessor. Just as it is with religious feelings. There are very few men who live entirely without religion in the world, but there are fewer still who care to own their religion publicly. An assumed indifference, or a deliberate carelessness of life, very often covers a good deal more real religion than the world would suppose. But the man has a character to lose, and therefore all his better feelings are kept well in the background. Could anything be more damning

than to get the name of being a good young man? Good gracious! What amount of moral courage would avail against the prospect of such a fate?

As it is Rowley's profession to be good, as he is peculiarly situated in that respect with regard to the other characters before us, it will not be so offensive, perhaps, to introduce him as a good young man. And he was a good young man. The amount of visiting work which he got through in the day during that dreary winter was astonishing. He was quite indefatigable in his attention to his self-imposed duty, untiring in his exertions to do all the good which lay in his power during the short hours of every weary day.

Many soup-tickets have been already dispensed before we find him climbing a rickety stair in the angle of a dirty court to make inquiries after the occupant of an obscure garret above.

A middle-aged man of skin and bone was seated in this comfortless abode. His shrivelled hands extended over a grate

which for days had not known a fire; shrunken cheeks and protruding cheek-bones, clothes scarcely hanging together, and shoes which disgraced their office.

One chair, a worm-eaten table, and a bed without bed-clothes, formed the furniture of the room, which had a dreary look, agreeing well with the expression of its tenant.

Absently, drearily, hopelessly he sits, with his thin hands stretched over an imaginary fire, and answers Rowley's knock without even turning his head. It could only be the woman to whom the wretched place belonged come to demand her rent again under threat of expulsion.

"It's bitter weather to be turned out of doors," he murmured, without looking up; "bitter weather, Mrs. Barker! bitter weather!"

"It's not your landlady," said Rowley, coming forward in his quiet, unobtrusive way, and explaining that he was the curate of the district. "I called to see if I could help you in any way."

The starving wretch looked up gratefully at the sound of a kind and gentle voice, such as he was so unaccustomed to, and in so doing disclosed to view a face from which even the ravages of hardship, penury, and distress had not yet effaced the traces of a refinement which had known better days. He rose from the chair and placed it for his visitor, thanking him for calling, and apologising for the meagre comfort of his dwelling. But times were bad, he said, and he cracked his fingers nervously, and looked upon the floor.

"Your landlady told me your name was Captain Egerton," Rowley said.

The fact was acknowledged with a weary sigh.

"You were better off, then, once? In the army?" suggested Rowley.

"Ay, indeed," was the absent reply.

There was a pause for a moment, while Rowley considered how best to proceed with delicacy.

"You have been unfortunate? Lost money, perhaps; or——"

"Unfortunate! Well, maybe, maybe. Call it so."

"But have you no relations who would help you?"

A gleam of fire shot into the dull, despairing eyes as he answered, looking Rowley straight in the face,—

"Did a man's relations ever help him, sir, when he was down? Don't they throw dirt at him till they've blackened him, and then point at him as an object of scorn, which they wouldn't dirty their own clean hands by touching? Help me! No," he said, as the same dejected, dreary look crept back into his face.

"You've quarrelled with them, perhaps? You may have been in fault."

"Likely enough, likely enough. But it's all forgotten now. I shan't trouble them again. No, not again."

"But if they knew how you were situated," urged Rowley, "they surely would do something for you."

"If I was starving, sir," the miserable man replied, with bitter energy, "and,

God knows, I'm not very far off it, they wouldn't lift a finger to help me. Didn't I beg, actually beg, at their doors long ago? and didn't they tell me that my condition was a judgment upon me, and pelt me with their piety? But, lift me out of the dirt? no; they wouldn't do that! And since that time I have not disgraced their doors again. I would sooner starve in this wretched place, sir, than ask a piece of bread from one of them to keep body and soul together. And when I'm dead may my blood be upon their heads, and may my bones cry out and curse them every one,—ay, curse them, and all that belongs to them!"

There was such a wild look in his face, as he uttered this imprecation, that Rowley sat uneasily for a moment upon his chair, doubting whether despair might not have affected his reason.

But in a moment the revengeful look faded away, and the same absent, listless expression came back. His overwrought feelings, acting upon his weak, physical condition, caused the tears to trickle down

the thin, hollow cheeks; and as he leant against the wall, and tried feebly to brush them off with his skeleton hands, he looked indeed a picture of misery and woe.

Rowley proceeded to point out to him how useless it was to expect Providence to assist him as long as he harboured such obstinate pride and revenge in his heart. "I don't know what the circumstances of your case may have been," he said, "but I can't think that at this distance of time, as you say it is, they could still retain any angry recollection of past offences,—if they were such."

There was another pause, and then Captain Egerton (as he has been called), touched by the curate's kind manner and willing sympathy, gradually entered into the history of his life.

"They were offences," he said; "I don't deny it. I was a prodigal son, sir, and to my shame I say it, for I had the kindest and best of fathers. And the sorrow that I caused that old man has been harder to me to bear than all the poverty

and hardship I've been through since, for he didn't deserve it; indeed he didn't!"

After a long pause he continued,—

"I was wild and extravagant, sir, and often—too often—he paid my debts, and I promised I would reform. But I was weak, and I couldn't keep to my word. And then at last for very shame I couldn't ask him again; and I drew bills, to be paid after his death. I speculated, sir, on his death—his death, who had never said an unkind word to me, or done a harsh act! And he came to hear of it; and then his kindly heart withered and dried up at the return which all his affection had met with, and he told me never to speak to him more. I sold my commission in the army, spent the proceeds, and then continued to bet and gamble without money to pay, going still from bad to worse, always down hill, till I was reduced to the small weekly sum which he paid me through his lawyer, for he wouldn't let me actually starve. And then he died—died—and the remorse which his death brought upon me—for it was my doing, sir,

my doing, and nothing else; he had never denied me anything, and I know but too well what a trial it was to him to cast me off—it's long ago now, but the bitter recollection of the way I treated that poor old man has never left me to this day, and will not till these wretched bones are in the grave."

He paused again, and drew his hand across his moistened eyes.

"The property was not entailed, and he left it all to a distant relation, a hard cruel man. High words about it passed between us afterwards, and he ordered his servants to take me off the premises. At that time, sir, I was starving, as I am now, and not one of them,—for I begged from others besides him,—would give me a helping hand. They said I was a disgrace to the name, and that they didn't wish to see my face again. And they haven't seen it. Often I've been days without a mouthful of food, sleeping in the bare streets, with scarcely a rag of clothing, but I never troubled them again, sir, never again! I had a spirit once, it's broken

now, aye, for a long time past! but there's a bit of it still remaining—just a little spark, a small, small spark!"

There was something rather to be admired in this pride which no privation could quench. And there is something which peculiarly appeals to one's sympathies in the spectacle of a man who was once a gentleman, animated by the same feelings, and mingling in the same society as ourselves, reduced to the condition of the unfortunate creature before us.

This was indeed but one of many such tales of suffering and misery, but the superior condition of the sufferer invested it with an adventitious interest in Rowley's eyes. He felt almost shy of offering him such small relief as his own moderate means could afford. But there was no occasion for any such feeling, for the light which came into the poor man's eye as he saw the means of procuring another meal, showed plainly how welcome was the gift, although it was received with a certain grateful dignity—not with the abject thanks of the natural pauper.

Rowley then pressed to be allowed to communicate with his friends, suggesting that if applied to through him they would probably render him some assistance. But he persistently refused to give any account of his family. He didn't know in fact where they might be now, or what changes might have taken place—it was so long since he had cared to inquire about them. His would-be benefactor was obliged, therefore, to give way. But he determined to find out the Cambridge Egerton's address from their mutual friend in Norfolk, and to communicate with him on behalf of his namesake. It was as likely as not that he would turn out to be a relation.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE this oft-told tale of a wasted life and neglected opportunities has been recited in the midst of the most poverty-stricken district of London, Harry Egerton has been whirling along in the train on his way to Lady Belvedere's for a week of balls and gaiety.

Who can say whether he, too, may not be on the road to a similar fate with his unhappy namesake? He has been fairly started, and it will not be his father's fault if he does not succeed.

Severity breeds necessity; necessity, recklessness; recklessness, habitual difficulties; habitual difficulties, carelessness, loss of principle, honour, sense of shame, self-respect, and one bad quality after another, until the pedigree terminates in VICE.

The train draws up to the platform of the little station where the Belvedere omnibus was waiting, and Harry recognises Lady Emily L'Estrange and a daughter getting out.

"How do you do, Lady Emily? Going to Belvedere, I suppose?"

Lady Emily *was* going to Belvedere, and did not seem particularly glad to find that Harry was going there too; for, after a couple of words of conversation, she turned her back upon him and proceeded towards the omnibus, Harry following with Florence, who had evinced a much greater satisfaction at meeting him than her mother cared to see. But Florence L'Estrange was always getting into trouble with her mother for preferring interesting to uninteresting young men. It was quite useless for Lady Emily to impress upon her the superior charms of rank and wealth,—she could not be made to understand them; and would often go away as pleased as possible to dance with a two-hundred-a-year-and-his-Treasury-pay pauper, who had cut her out from under the very bows of a gaunt-looking, stolid eldest

son, whom Lady Emily had taken infinite trouble to become acquainted with, in order that she might introduce him to her daughters. Foolish, wayward girl!

The Belvedere footman hurries up, touches his hat, and busies himself about Egerton's portmanteau, while Lady Emily's servant conducts her maid and luggage to the exit.

There were a couple of other men on the platform standing by their traps, talking together in an undertone, and looking over at the other party as if they meant Belvedere too; but the footman didn't think they looked like it, and took no notice of them. Discriminating footman!

However, Harry found them getting up after him on to the roof of the omnibus; and from a closer inspection of the person of the one next to him, and the conversation which they entered into during the two miles' drive to the house, he formed a shrewd suspicion that his neighbour was nothing more nor less than a "spring captain" in disguise. How or why he was coming to Belvedere was a mystery, until

he found that his aunt had been hard-up for men, and had been obliged to send out for a brace to the neighbouring garrison town.

The other was a young man of few words, who had not the assurance of his senior to disguise the very evident sensation of being out of his element. Among the young ladies of the garrison, or the hairdressers' shops of the town, he was quite a *beau garçon;* but a large party in a smart house was a very different thing, and he felt it.

The lights from the house glimmer through the twilight, the omnibus rattles under the portico, the door opens upon a goodly row of plain clothes and livery within, and the party enter the warm, well-lighted hall. The ladies make for the drawing-room, while the gentlemen get rid of their coats and wrappings; and then they, too, commit their names to the tender mercies of the butler's pronunciation.

Harry listens for the names of his travelling companions, and hears, with an inward chuckle, Captain Mullins—he usually likes to spell it Moleyns—and Mr. Spicer.

Lady Belvedere sails up in a rustling *moire*, shakes hands, and retreats again upon Lady Emily. "Such dreadful weather for travelling! they must be frozen! there would be tea immediately."

Lady Emily only gives half her interest to her hostess, the remainder wanders over the other occupants of the room—she is anxious to see what sort of a party she has been asked to meet. They are not all there; but she sees one or two *partis* whom it will be worth Florence's while to cultivate; and Lady Belvedere hints at an old duchess up-stairs, who will be worthy of her own interest. Satisfied, apparently, with her investigation, she condescends to give a little more attention to Lady Belvedere's conversation.

Lady Emily L'Estrange was in the habit of receiving some deference and attention, as a matter of course; for, after many years' assumption of greatness, which otherwise she never would have attained, people had actually come to look upon her as a person of influence and position; and therefore she now considered that the ordinary civilities of

society might be dispensed with, as she was so immeasurably superior to the generality of the people whom she met.

Harry, too, has glanced round the room, where the other people are seated talking or working, expectant of tea; has shaken hands with Lord Staunton, and also with Lady Emily's *partis*, who were the sort of country-house men who hover on the borders of either sex; inclining perhaps of the two to tea-tables and gossip—who wear large turquoise and diamond rings—who more frequently quote a woman than a man as an authority, but who yet manage to get along in male society, being not absolutely incapable of masculine pursuits.

The young ladies had renewed their acquaintance with Florence L'Estrange, and were deeply engaged discussing their last visits, the balls they had lately attended, where my *bouillonée* pink, or my blue looped up with forget-me-nots, was worn, or where my new tunic, trimmed with all sorts of pretty things, was so much admired. This is rash—I know it, and tremble—for of

course, it's quite absurd to suppose that young ladies ever talk such nonsense, or think so much about their dress. Let us hurry on, please, while an elderly companion of Lady Belvedere's dispenses tea.

Captain Mullins and Mr. Spicer adhere to each other upon the same spot where they made their bows on entrance, and knowing nobody but each other in the room, stroke their moustaches (a few incipient hairs in poor Spicer's case) and shift uneasily from one foot to the other—pull out their pocket-handkerchiefs under pretence of blowing an unnecessary nose—return their handkerchiefs—put one hand then into the side pocket of the cutaway black coats in which they have thought it right to appear, and disfigure its sit by the unnatural drag upon the one side—get a little red as they hear their own voices talking in an undertone to one another, each trying to persuade the other that he is perfectly at his ease, but feeling painfully conscious that they are being inspected by the other men. Lady Belvedere's dog waddles up to them, and

immediately becomes an object of affectionate interest to Captain Mullins, who stoops down and pats the creature fondly, assuring her that she is a nice little dog—such a nice little dog! Spicer is thus left standing unsupported. One hand still remains in the side pocket, while the other brushes imaginary specks from a gradually reddening face, and he is immensely relieved when the companion asks if he won't have some tea? Of course he would; a tea-cup would be occupation for both hands at once. And, accordingly, he is soon standing in the full enjoyment of his cup and saucer. (He doesn't quite understand drinking tea at this hour—they don't do it in barracks.) Taking short sips makes the employment last the longer, and when he does at last come to the bottom of his cup, there is the sugar and the spoon to play with until there is a general move, and the ladies go to their rooms. He opens the door with great politeness, and then joins Captain Mullins at a small table, where he is feigning ease over a photograph-book, indulging in a *sotto voce* whistle the more to evince his

perfect unconcern and freedom from embarrassment.

Egerton and the other young men continue to laugh and talk at the fire-place, and Lord Staunton and another elderly gentleman are deep in farming and politics at the other end of the room; so that the military have time to go twice through the photograph-book before the dressing-bell rings. What a relief was the sound of that booming gong to Spicer! They are shown to their rooms by the footman who attends upon them, and there begin at once a careful and elaborate toilet.

When Harry came down to dinner, there were several more people in the room whom he had not yet seen. Country neighbours, some of them—people who stood in great awe of Lady Belvedere, and were patronised by her accordingly—who were asked to dine once or twice in the year, and were always very punctual, and very much impressed by the great people whom they met—who also talked with great admiration on their way home of the magnificent display of plate, the Marchioness of So-and-so's diamonds, the

stylish appearance of the Countess of Thingumbob, the elegant dress of Lady A——, or the airs which Miss B—— gave herself.

There were others also of the party in the house who had not come down to tea, or had left the room before he arrived.

Lady Emily had already pinned the duchess; and it was nothing but my *dear* duchess till dinner was announced.

Miss Grant was there too, seated in severe state upon an ottoman; and to her Harry is now for the first time introduced by his aunt, and desired to take her in to dinner.

Consulting her list, Lady Belvedere proceeds to tell off the different pairs, while Harry tries to make himself interesting to the absolute owner of six thousand a year and a deer-park.

Miss Grant was no longer, strictly speaking, young. She had lost the peach-bloom from her cheek, and her features were a little sharp, perhaps; mouth verging on the acidity of the aging spinster; coiffure somewhat severe and classical (for Miss Grant, you must know, was a person of a cultivated

mind—at least, she hoped she was); bust decidedly unattractive. The contour of the arm, too, was not exactly what Harry could have wished. Neither was the manner of his reception quite so cordial as he might have liked.

The fact was that Miss Grant's experience of life had shown her that it was not to her, but to her purse, that men generally were civil or attentive. And therefore she always now assumed a *noli me tangere* expression in her intercourse with them. She had even been known to regret that she should never be able to marry, since she never should be able to persuade herself that it was not for her money that she was wooed. Certainly the time was fast going by when men could be expected to conceive a tender passion for her person.

Dinner was announced, and platitudes and commonplaces gave way to still more forced remarks as the party paraded in pairs, according to the brilliance of their plumage, for the inspection of a long row of servants and probably a circle of ad-

miring maids in the gallery. A bird's-eye view of these dinner processions may be very pretty, but this formal marshalling of the forces for an attack upon the evening meal is a barbarously civilised idea—particularly when you see some little chit of a girl sent out before an elderly married lady who happens to be a peg below her in the peerage. And why should not some benevolent and thoughtful person institute some way of getting into the dining-room without putting poor shy little Spicer through the hideous torture of that stilted promenade with a young lady he has never seen before? What *is* he to say to her? The cold weather has been exhausted in his ante-prandial attempts at conversation. Look at him—only look and pity. He feels that every servant has his eye upon him, and his imagination persistently refuses to suggest an observation. The idea that he is in the ante-room of a great event has produced an unnatural feeling of solemnity in his mind. And what with his shyness and his terror of those grim servants, and the feeling that he

ought to have said something, and that he has said nothing—altogether, he takes his seat at the table with very little appetite for his dinner.

When Harry had well settled himself into the voluminous dresses on either side, he gallantly continued his attempts to draw the heiress. Miss Grant hitherto had been freezing, and the soup had no thawing effect.

He asked what she had been doing all the winter, and found that she was very fond of staying at home.

Her county was Northumberland?

Her county *was* Northumberland.

Very cold up there, wasn't it?

Yes, it was.

He ventured to pursue this elementary theme a stage further, and suggested that it would be cold going to the ball on the ensuing evening. Was Miss Grant going to this ball?

Miss Grant believed that she had come to Belvedere for that purpose mainly.

Was she fond of balls?

In the country she was.

"But I've seen you at balls in London too," said Harry, thinking she might be flattered at having attracted notice.

Not at all; rather the contrary. She had probably been pointed out to him as the heiress. So she answered, still more shortly, that it was quite possible.

She was a bore, distinctly. And so he turned his attention to Miss Florence L'Estrange, who sat upon his other side, and they were soon engaged in a lively conversation.

It was as good as a play to watch Lady Emily's face as she scowled down the table at her unconscious innocent. And didn't she pay him off afterwards by an extra degree of cordial frost!

Spicer of ours looked across the table at Egerton with envy unspeakable. What would he not have given for a tithe of Harry's ease? The poor fellow was crumbling his bread all to atoms, and twisting his napkin under the table in a fever of nervousness. Little beads of perspiration were coming out upon his forehead, and he had

been unable to think of a single remark for the edification or amusement of either neighbour. To one he had not been introduced, and he could willingly have shrunk into his shoes as he heard himself replying monosyllabically to some observation with which she had endeavoured to seduce his shyness. It was an awful moment—crumble, crumble, crumble—what would come next? The suspense was terrible!

Captain Mullins had found himself seated eventually between the country neighbour who had been assigned to his aristocratic arm, and Lady Emily L'Estrange, whose name he had heard from Harry as they drove from the station. With Lady Emily, after a glass or two of champagne, he made an attempt to enter into conversation.

"You know this part of the country, Lady L'Estrange?"

I conclude that it is a military custom to leave out the Christian name in a case of this kind, for in a tale of barrack-life, taken up lately, the principal character in the first

page is Lady Double Dash, and in the next page she becomes Lady Dash. It is, however, just possible that Captain Mullins' experience of society was not among the "higher circles;" for the old Duchess of Diamonds, whom Lady Emily was so glad to have an opportunity of being pleasant to, was always quoted by him to his brother-officers afterwards as Lady Diamonds.

Be this as it may, Lady Emily's look was not encouraging as she answered curtly that she had been at Belvedere before.

The gallant Captain went on to remark that it was a tip-top hunting country, and Lady Emily said, "Indeed!"

Very comfortable quarters, too, Captain Mullins said, that they had in this neighbouring town, and Lady Emily replied, "Really!"

He and his brother officers intended giving a hop (Captain Mullins had a pretty turn of wit) next month, and Lady Emily looked at him, and said, "Oh!"

If they adhered to their avowed intention, he hoped that they should have the

pleasure of seeing Lady L'Estrange and her daughter.

Not likely she should come all that way for a garrison ball, Lady Emily said, turning abruptly to her other neighbour, and leaving the military one in some doubt whether his advances had made the favourable impression which the insinuating suavity of his address deserved.

"Did the man want us to sleep in the barracks?" her ladyship said afterwards. "Who is the wretch? Where does he come from?"

Cornelia Grant meanwhile was becoming rather piqued at Harry's neglect. She was accustomed to being made much of by young men, and he had found the charming Florence so pleasant that he had confined his attention to her ever since the commencement of dinner.

Accordingly, taking advantage of the first pause, she vouchsafed to address a remark to him of her own accord; and finding that he was not anxious to make up to her, retained his attention to the end of dinner, and

went away leaving rather a favourable impression on his mind. She was not so bad after all—could be pleasant enough if she liked.

The ladies having left the room, the elder gentlemen determine towards the end of the table, where Lord Staunton was playing host for Lady Belvedere; and Harry found himself next to our friend Mullins.

Mullins had become quite genial and jovial under the influence of the good things which he had been taking in with such gusto, and seemed disposed to be merry—loud he undoubtedly was. His whole appearance was a picture—a study. Spicer only knew how much he envied him. That hair so carefully parted in the middle and the back. His face is tolerably well known—the thick moustache and reddish whiskers. Then the tie so indefinitely small that it might have been neglected. Quite the man of fashion! They always wear them so, Mullins says. Mullins, in fact, was the Brummell of the regiment. To see him on band days in his blue frock-coat and his leer. Oh! it

was charming. But the elaborate silk collar to his evening coat must not be neglected (the coat was new for this smart visit), neither must the shirt front, a miracle of elaborate workmanship, setting off studs of matchless taste and size, and the brass-mounted waistcoat. Certainly no one could have said that Mullins was not a well-dressed man, even if they had passed unnoticed the gorgeous rings which hands, well disposed on either side his plate, set off. You dog! you had an eye for a pretty girl, too. You had; you know you had. You are talking now about Florence L'Estrange, as you bring your chair closer to Harry's. Plenty of go in her, you think, eh?

Yes, Harry said, she was a very nice girl. "You were sitting next to her mother. Oh! but of course you know her—I forgot."

"Lady L'Estrange! Gad, sir, she's the devil. I thought she was going to swallow me up, skin and bones, and all, at one time. She looked so d——d sour at me. Turned her confounded old head away then, and, damme, I let her alone after that."

Harry smiled as he thought what a well-matched pair Lady Emily and Mullins were in reality, although the former did think herself so far above the vulgar consideration of ordinary social manners.

"Do you know Miss Grant?" he asked; "the one I took in to dinner. She's an heiress."

"Gad, you don't mean that! What's her figure?"

"Six thousand a-year."

"Damn it, I say, old fellow" (the Captain forgot that he didn't know his neighbour's name), "she's worth looking after." And he tipped his friend a knowing wink as he spoke, and pursued the subject for some minutes longer with very considerable humour.

Egerton then made some inquiry as to his quarters, and the vernal one launched forth into several incidents of barrack life, which he thought Harry would relish.

"You come over there and look me up," he said; "*I*'ll show you some sport. There are some deuced pretty girls about the place,"

he added, with the air of a Don Juan. "Ask Spicer if there ain't."

He then entered into a detailed account of an intrigue in which he had lately been engaged, and seemed to consider (who will say that he was wrong?) that the whole enjoyment of life consisted in ogling women and drinking brandy and soda in the morning.

Egerton took such a polite interest in his adventures that Mullins slapped him on the back as they left the dining-room, and told Spicer that he was a regular clinker—that they must get him up to barracks, and put him up to a thing or two in garrison life.

CHAPTER XII.

"ARE you fond of music, Mr. Egerton?" asked Florence L'Estrange, the next morning, as Harry lolled upon the piano where she was playing, turning over the music that was strewed about.

Mr. Egerton was very fond of music.

Did he play?

With one finger only.

Why did he never learn?

Oh! he didn't exactly know why. He had never thought of it.

"What a pity!" Florence said. "It's such a resource."

Harry supposed it was. "But there are lots of other things always to do. You can read, or——"

"Or what?"

"Or something else,—anything."

"Smoke, I suppose; nothing useful, I'm sure."

"How do you know what I do?"

"I suppose you are all much the same. If you are not hunting or shooting, you're doing nothing."

"But I beg your pardon," returned Harry, laughing, "I do a great many things."

"What?" rejoined Florence, without stopping her music. "Tell me one."

"Why, let me see," replied Harry, but nothing worth mentioning occurred at the moment, and he laughed again as he said, "Oh! a lot of things. I can't, just this minute, enumerate them all."

Florence laughed too. "You men pretend that you are so much more use in the world than we are, and you can't show me anything that you do that's useful. Now, we always are doing something, working, or reading, or looking after your comfort in some way. Mr. Egerton wants to persuade me that he is never idle," she continued, turning to Miss Grant. "He thinks that

men are more useful than women. I don't agree with him, do you?"

"Certainly young men are not, Mr. Egerton," said Cornelia Grant, putting down her book. "As far as my experience goes, you do nothing but amuse yourselves from one year's end to another."

"But you couldn't get on without us," pleaded Harry, amid a chorus of dissent. "We employ a good deal of our time in making ourselves agreeable to you."

"How good of you!" said Miss Grant; and she looked as if she thought that her happiness would not be very much lessened if all the idle young men of her acquaintance were non-existent.

"But I don't know that you do always make yourselves agreeable," said one of Lord Staunton's daughters. "I know a great many men who do very much the contrary."

"If that's all the use you are, Mr. Egerton," said Miss L'Estrange, gaily, "you must confess that we have the best of it."

"It would be much nearer the truth to say that men couldn't exist without women,"

said Miss Grant. "Why, we do everything for you. Some men would be always in difficulties, if it wasn't for their wives, who have a greal deal more sense than they have, and arrange everything for them."

"Yes, domestic arrangements," Harry said; "but men do all the business."

"Some do. What business do you do, now?"

"I? Well, just at present, none. But I suppose I shall go into some profession some day."

"And, in the meantime, you are kind enough to devote yourself to our entertainment. We ought to be very much obliged."

Harry declared that he couldn't defend himself against such superior odds, and was being bantered by Florence on his defeat, when the door opened, and Lady Emily entered. Seeing her daughter at the piano, and Egerton hanging over it laughing and talking with her, she swept out of the room again, saying, "I want to speak to you, Florence."

Florence rose and followed her, glancing with comic meaning at one of her friends as she passed, and Lady Emily became the subject of discussion after the door had closed behind her.

"I pity any girl with such a mother," Miss Grant said, after various opinions had been expressed about her. "The daughters can't help being injured by their mother's vulgarity. One cannot understand how such an extravagantly ill-bred woman could have made her way in society as she has done. It seems that there's nothing like assuming a great deal. People are easily imposed upon."

"Do you know the eldest daughter?" Harry asked of his nearest neighbour.

She did, to her cost, and was going on to tell him why, when other men entered the room, and the conversation changed.

An early dinner has been concluded. The ladies are already in the hall, busying themselves with the external proprieties of female night attire. The gentlemen are burning their throats with hot and hurried coffee. Coats

and hats are being selected, and flowers, stolen from the hothouses, adjusted.

The cavalcade of carriages draws up to the door, and the two old gentlemen who are going to stay behind, wheeze back into the drawing-room out of the draught.

A frosty moon is shining brightly down upon the glistening rime upon the grass; and, one after another, the several bundles of condensed and muffled ball-costumes crush into their respective carriages, according to Lady Belvedere's directions.

Harry has been sent to take care of Miss Grant and others,—having, by special request, avoided a six-mile drive with Lady Emily L'Estrange. Mullins and Spicer are delighted to find themselves by themselves, bringing up the rear in one of the hired conveyances.

The first lamps of the town soon come into sight, and the town-hall awning receives them shortly after in its soiled embrace.

Lady Belvedere is a very great person in —— shire, and her party, therefore, creates quite a sensation as they make their way to

the upper end of the room, where other county families are already assembled.

A select quadrille is formed, and Harry Egerton finds himself, *faute de mieux*, dancing with Miss Grant.

Faute de mieux, because there were others whom he would have preferred. But, as he acknowledged to himself, he might have had a much worse *pis aller* than Cornelia of the deer park. She had been so full of conversation, and so agreeable withal, during their drive (not snubbing him once), that the six miles had appeared as nothing.

The various people around occupy their attention for some time, and Miss Grant's criticisms are amusing enough; not ill-natured, exactly, but just tinged with the acid of turning youth. There was plenty of food for criticism and amusement, for the most strange and curious costumes dotted the room, and most fearful and wonderful heads surmounted them. Heads which might have assumed life, positively for this one night only, and left the hairdressers' windows to the sole care of the brushes and

pomades; heads belonging to old women whose normal ornaments might be presumed to be a broom and dust-pan; coiffures of the latest provincial fashion, which provoked many a smile from the London eye.

Men there were, too, of elaborately-brushed hair, who came and stared at the people at the top of the room, as if they were looking at them from behind a counter; men who had it in their minds to eat prodigiously, and to drink much questionable champagne, when the supper-room was open.

Stewards, too, bedizened with rosettes, flitted importantly about the room, with a most comic assumption of dignity, and most officiously impressed with the responsibilities of their position. It was worth driving six miles to see.

Excepting for the odd people to be met, Miss Grant thought that county balls were generally stupid affairs. "But you have an opportunity," she said, "of studying characters that you never meet anywhere else."

Undoubtedly there was that advantage, Harry admitted. He devoted such a very

considerable portion of his time when there (or anywhere else) to the study of character.

"Tell me, Mr. Egerton, where does that Captain Mullins come from? I've been wondering where Lady Belvedere could have picked him up."

The question was suggested by a distant glimpse of Mullins, in close confab with another military-looking friend, after his own cut.

Harry believed that he was quartered in the town, and had been asked because his aunt could get no other men. "He seems a very nice fellow," he added drily.

"Very," replied his partner, and they laughed. Cornelia was then accused of having a turn for satire, and seemed rather pleased at the accusation. She had had some practice in putting down men, and rather piqued herself upon her power. "You needn't be afraid," she said; "I dare say I shall not hurt you."

Harry laughed, and hoped not. His eye encountered Lady Belvedere's at the moment, and she smiled, as much as to say,

"You are getting on very well; only go on as you have begun."

A neighbour of Lady Emily's, seeing the glance, inquired of her who he was, and heard in reply that he was a Mr. Egerton, a nephew of Lady Belvedere's, without a penny, rather a *mauvais sujet* Lady Emily believed. He had been very extravagant, and quarrelled with his father (chaperones of course know everything). Seemed to be making up to Miss Grant. But he wouldn't do much in that quarter. She had had too much experience of needy men already.

"Who will Lady Belvedere leave her money to?" asked the other.

Lady Emily couldn't say. It was supposed that this nephew might be her heir.

"She never had any children, I believe."

"There was a son once, but he didn't live. I've heard that there was something strange about his death. She was abroad at the time. Something about Jesuits. I dare say she'll leave everything to some Roman Catholic priest. They say she's on the point of turning now, and there's a chapel

at Belvedere that's a disgrace to any Protestant woman's house."

Other eyes besides Lady Emily's and her friend's were observing Harry and his partner.

The gay Mullins, whom they had just been discussing, was pointing him out to another spring friend in a distant corner, where he had found more congenial society.

"That fellow, Egerton," he was exclaiming,—"Gad, sir, he's making the running hot with the heiress. Twenty thousand a year, clear! Eh, my boy? What do you think of that? I intend to have a shy at her myself before the week's out; don't you make any mistake."

What a pleasure in store for the heiress, if she could only have known it, what joys of anticipation she might have experienced!

"Splendid house," the Captain went on, —"magnificent! everything tip-top. Gad, you should see the plate! And the old woman knows how to do the thing in style. 'Pon my soul, old chap, I feel a

d——d sight more comfortable in barracks than I do in the middle of these bloated aristocratic coves. A duchess, a real live duchess, eh? Gad, little Spicer was in a blue funk all yesterday—he's got his pecker up a bit to-day. She gives a ball in the house on Friday. Did she ask any of you fellows? I'll put in a good word for you."

Captain Mullins again assumes the superior air which in confidence he had forgotten, and makes his way with an important step to the upper end of the room, to include himself in the Belvedere circle.

Egerton shortly after finds himself resting in an improvised alcove with Lady Emily's disobedient daughter.

"Your friend, Mr. Villars, has come home again, has he not?" asks Florence.

"Yes, some time. Do you know him?"

"Of course I do. His sister is my dearest friend."

"Is she?" Harry asks eagerly, and thinks Florence L'Estrange one of the most charming girls of his acquaintance.

"Oh, I'm quite devoted to her!" Florence

replies, and then asks her companion, so innocently, if he knows her well.

Harry answers unsuspectingly, "Yes—oh, yes! That is, yes, I suppose I do, very well. I've been staying there, you know."

"And isn't she very nice?"

Yes, he said, he liked her very much indeed.

"But don't you think she's quite the nicest girl you know? I do," Florence exclaimed in a rapture of friendship. "Although everyone likes her so much, she isn't a bit spoilt; she's always the same."

Harry didn't notice the sly expression of mischief which preceded the demure look with which she listened to his warm endorsement of Blanche's attractions. And Florence went on to ask if Mottistone was a nice place.

"Now tell me what Blanche does," she said, settling herself to take a lively interest in all that he might say about her. "What is she like in her own house? Charming, I'm sure."

Very much so indeed, if she was to

believe all that Harry said in her praise. She appeared to greater advantage there, he thought, than anywhere else.

"And what did you do? Did you ride? Do you like riding? Blanche rides beautifully, doesn't she?"

Of course she did. What did she not do well? And Harry became so engrossed at last with the enumeration of all the different points which there were to like in her, that Florence, who had managed her countenance very skilfully so far, was obliged to keep her bouquet to her face to hide the smiles she was unable to repress.

When she was in the full enjoyment of the enthusiasm into which she had betrayed him, he happened to look up suddenly, to enlist her sympathy for some more particularly admirable trait, and found her looking at him with such a quiet fun that he drew in his horns at once, got a little red, and tried to laugh off his earnestness; asked her if she was sure she wouldn't have any tea; and then returned her to her mother's charge.

The consciousness of having been made fun of was annoying for a time. But he bore his tormentor no malice, and they said good night when the ladies of the party took their departure with, perhaps, a tinge more interest and friendliness than usual.

The younger men stayed some time longer, and returned together in a haze of tobacco. A very much pleasanter way of returning than being seated with your back to the horses for a six-mile drive in the small hours of the morning, with your legs cramped up under some elderly lady's crinoline, shins being barked against the steel, back doubled up with would-be sleep, and head nodding loosely and spasmodically down upon your knees. That whiff of damp cold air, too, as the window is let down to see why on earth the turnpike man does not come. "Ugh! hurry on, coachman; get home, for heaven's sake! I'm hanged if I drive six miles to a ball again, if I know it!" And at last the horses pull up before the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE early birds next morning were a little surprised to see a fly and a pair of jaded horses drive up to the house as they were sitting down to breakfast, and still more surprised to see our two military men, Mullins and Spicer, issue therefrom.

It turned out on inquiry that the driver had taken a wrong turn in the dark, and that they had been wandering about the roads for several hours.

The occupants of the vehicle, however, heard this now for the first time. They had seen all the dancers out, and had remained behind for a jollification with other choice spirits, returning eventually to their fly in much the same condition as that in which they found their worthy driver. It was a mere miracle that they had not passed the night

in a ditch. The driver had not thought it necessary to awake them, when he himself awoke and found that they had left the road. And Mullins was now so very confused and dry about the tongue that he was obliged to reserve his expletives until he comprehended what it really meant. Spicer meanwhile had slipped away quietly to his room.

One after another the various bed-rooms gave up their tenants late on into the morning; and the young ladies, having carefully taken their places with their backs to the light, had much to say upon the excitement of the previous night.

In the evening, after dinner, Harry found himself engaged with a cup of coffee and Miss Grant in the drawing-room.

His frank, open manner had rather charmed her suspicious nature, and as she had a sufficiently attractive address for anybody whom she condescended to like, they were already on good terms. It is always a little flattering to the vanity to be preferred by a slightly superior woman.

They were discussing little Spicer, who was talking uncomfortably to some one in a far-off corner of the room.

"Shy," Miss Grant supposed. And Harry tried to persuade her that he, too, laboured under the same affliction.

"Really!" she answered, raising her eyebrows. "You're vainer than I thought you, then. Shyness is only vanity," she continued, in explanation. "You think people are always observing you, and noticing every little thing you do. If you were not always thinking about yourself, and how you looked, you wouldn't be shy."

"But I don't necessarily want people to admire me, if I'm shy. I only want them not to see me at a disadvantage. I don't want to appear in a more ridiculous light than I need."

"It's very much the same thing. You are self-conscious, occupied with your appearance, and anxious to appear as favourably as possible."

"Well, I should call it a kind of negative

vanity," Harry said, "if there is such a thing."

"It's a great misfortune to a girl being shy. Much worse than to a man. You don't like a shy partner, I dare say?"

"I suppose you don't either," laughed Harry.

"But then a girl who is shy doesn't get partners at all."

"It isn't only shyness that makes girls uninteresting," Harry said. "It isn't only young ladies who have just come out who are difficult to get on with."

"You gentlemen are always finding fault with young ladies for not being able to make themselves interesting enough for you. Perhaps you will tell me, Mr Egerton, what you think they ought to talk about?"

Miss Grant never included herself in the ruck of the young ladies of the day, considering that her independent position, and the superior intellectual capacity of which she was conscious, rather raised her above the ordinary crowd. Besides, it was a good many years since she had been a *débutante*,

and every year that she added to her experience took her a step farther from the dancing world.

Egerton laughed as he replied that it was not for him to lay down rules for conversation. He only knew that he got a little bored at the end of the season, talking about balls and operas and that sort of thing every night.

"Are you talking of young ladies' conversation?" asked Lord Staunton, who had caught the last few words of his reply. "They tell me," he said, "that they suit their conversation to their partners."

"But what if they get a partner a little better than usual, Lord Staunton?"

"You are not an ordinary partner then, Mr. Egerton!" said Miss Grant. "I must remember that if I ever have the honour of dancing with you again."

Oh! Harry was not thinking of himself, though indeed he must confess that he had been bored sometimes in a quadrille.

Taking a bird's-eye view of the question, wasn't it rather a case of the pot calling the

kettle black? Can one dancing man out of ten pretend to any greater intelligence or more cultivated conversational adaptability (what a mouthful!) than any similar proportion of girls can claim? The brain-pan is empty in each case, and *ex nihilo nihil fit* is very old intelligence.

"It surprises me," Lord Staunton resumed, "to hear the way young men talk of young ladies nowadays. When I was a young man we used to consider it a favour for a lady to dance with us. It is quite the other way now. Young fellows saunter about a ball-room, and make a favour of dancing; and more than that, think nothing of throwing over an engagement. We should never have thought of using such terms as 'round' and 'square,' as I hear commonly done now—such expressions would have marked the vulgarian at once. I'm afraid the whole tone of society has changed very much for the worse."

"I quite agree with you, Lord Staunton," said Miss Grant, emphatically. "The young men of the present day don't know the

meaning of the words politeness and gallantry."

"I attribute it entirely to the abolition of duelling," said Lord Staunton. "Any deficiency in politeness towards a lady in my day would have involved a man in a duel at once. And the practice, therefore, had a most wholesome influence on society generally. No man would have dared to elbow his way past ladies, and to treat them with the easy familiarity which I observe to be so very usual now."

"But then, Lord Staunton," interposed Egerton in defence of his class, "some years ago society was not such a crowd; you had room to move. I don't think men are nearly so polite as they might be, but I don't think you often see us doing anything actually rude."

"Rude!" exclaimed Lord Staunton. "Why, isn't want of politeness rudeness enough? And if it were not, have I not often seen young fellows standing at the top of the stairs outside a ball-room, making no attempt to move to allow a lady to pass;

and sitting down at the supper-table when ladies were standing behind them; and doing a hundred other similar things equally ungallant and ill-bred?"

Egerton could not deny that such things were, so he merely said that men who behaved like that could hardly be gentlemen.

"It's only your characteristic selfishness coming out more strongly, Mr. Egerton," said Miss Grant.

"Mine!" laughed Harry.

"Not yours, perhaps, in particular, but men's generally. You never think of anything but your own pleasure, and expect us to contribute to it in every way. Our inclinations are quite immaterial."

"You are rather hard upon us, Miss Grant," said Lord Staunton. "Are we all to be included in the same condemnation?"

"Well, I'll except you, Lord Staunton," she answered, laughing.

He bowed profoundly.

"I don't think men are so selfish to each other, at all events," said Harry, "even if

they are to ladies; which, of course, I don't admit."

"Of course not! What man ever did?"

Egerton had a lurking notion, I believe, that women were created to minister to the happiness of man, and that therefore it was a sort of instinct in man to expect such servitude; but as he had never thought out the notion, he naturally did not enunciate so impolite a sentiment.

Lord Staunton attributed the defective manners of the rising generation to another cause. Society, he said, was undergoing a change. There was a stratum of vulgar money forcing itself to the surface, and bringing its manners along with it; and as the tendency to make money at any sacrifice of position or tradition was increasing, every year would only see the evil still further advancing.

"Nothing," he said, "vulgarises the manners of a society more than the indiscriminate admission of persons who have nothing but their money to recommend

them. They are essentially selfish and ill-mannered themselves, and they must contaminate in time those with whom they come in contact; and now that men of rank and position recognise mere money-making as one of the liberal professions, it will not be a matter for surprise if the old traditional manners of the upper classes die out. It cannot be otherwise, when their interests are narrowed to the one idea of self-aggrandisement, and when they are constantly rubbing against the self-seeking and meanness and low-bred pride of purse which distinguish the mere money-maker. I should be very sorry to see any son of mine devoted to such an ignoble pursuit—he shall make himself useful to others in the world besides himself. Depend upon it, Miss Grant, democracy is not more destructive to the manners of a nation than this eager race for money will prove—has proved, I may say."

Lord Staunton, it would seem, was no false prophet. In his early days, if any woman had committed such a flagrant breach of good manners as to accuse an invited

guest of having come to her house without an invitation, and required him to leave—or if a man of high position had shown, in the presence of royalty, that his manners had been formed in the servants' hall—would such persons have been tolerated any longer in good society? Would people of position have continued to eat their dinners and frequent their balls, and admit them to their houses? *Credat Judæus Apella.* But now, *nous avons changé tout cela;* a large house and much money are a passport into the very best society; no unpleasant questions are asked on the score of manners. Politeness steps gracefully aside to allow Wealth to pass. Ill-breeding is denounced in boudoirs, and courted in public. Very soon even the farce of denouncing it in private will be omitted. And then democracy! Ho! for democracy! There are many roads to one goal. Conservative measures may be the quickest, but they are not the only route.

Lord Staunton was proceeding to say that it was not only in gallantry that the young men of the day were backward: "I take

it," he said, "that they are going down-hill in every respect. The slang, the ignorance, the utter want of principle, the——" A volume of—perhaps not ill-deserved—abuse would no doubt have been launched against the period by this *laudator temporis acti*, had the conversation not been interrupted here by one of the party from the adjoining room, who came to summon Miss Grant to see the last new thing from the spirit world—Planchette.

"Planchette!" she repeated. "What is Planchette?"

"Come and see," was the reply.

And Cornelia, smiling a strong-minded smile of incredulity, approached the table.

The attention of the lookers-on was riveted upon a little piece of flat board upon wheels, which, with a pencil inserted at one end, was moving up and down a sheet of writing-paper, guided, as it seemed, by two of the party, whose hands rested upon the board.

It stops,—and the mediums announce with much solemnity that Planchette has done writing. The hieroglyphics are ex-

amined with eager interest, but nothing is to be made out of them this time.

"Now, Miss Grant, will you ask some question? Put your hand on as well, and then you'll see that we don't make it move, —that it does it all of its own accord."

"What sort of question am I to ask?" said Cornelia, still smiling incredulously.

"Oh, anything. Ask who you liked best at the ball last night."

"Very well," she said, carelessly. "Who did I like best at the ball last night?"

"You must bend your mind to it, you know, and don't laugh."

Three hands now rest upon Planchette, and the others look on in expectation.

For a few moments the magic board makes no sign. But when the electricity from the new hand (according to believers) had entered well into it, the wheels began to move backwards and forwards, up and down, until at last they turned and left the paper, thereby intimating that there was nothing further to be said.

The writing was examined, and there,

plain as possible, in the middle of the paper, were the words, "Mr. Egerton." Strange, but true!

"Such foolish nonsense!" Miss Grant said, moving away contemptuously from the table, and colouring with anger more than any other feeling. "Just as if the pencil could move of itself!" She believed that they had done it on purpose, and that she had been made the victim of a practical joke. And she went and sat down by Lady Belvedere, and pretended to enter into conversation as if nothing had occurred to ruffle her.

Seeing that she didn't take it as a joke at all, the others dissembled their smiles, and Harry tried to laugh off his embarrassment by ridiculing the idea of its being able to answer questions of itself.

"You ask it something, then," said Miss L'Estrange, who was the chief medium.

"Tell me what horse is going to win the Derby, then," said Harry.

Planchette started off at once when the attention of the mediums had been fixed,

and wrote the name of an outsider, which they solemnly declared that they had never heard before.

The sceptics were rather staggered, and when various other rational answers were given to questions propounded, some of them began to think there might be something in it after all. Whether it was the devil, or some other infernal agency, they were unable to decide. But curious stories were told of strangely correct answers which some of the party had seen given elsewhere, and before the evening was over Planchette had made quite a character for itself, except among the old people, who would have nothing to say to it.

I don't think that Harry had become so far a convert as to believe that the outsider mentioned for the Derby would win; but he thought it rather odd that Miss Grant should have been accused of partiality towards him. The other girls would not have dared to do it on purpose. Besides, there had been, as far as he could see, no apparent foundation for it. There must be something

in it, his vanity said. And he began to speculate on the possible results of such a partiality.

Seen through the light of six thousand a-year, she was not so very plain after all. And she was undoubtedly very agreeable to talk to. Not so very much older than himself either! Such marriages took place every day of the year. If he did marry her all his debts would be paid off; he would be relieved from the torment of duns, and could do just as he liked, and amuse himself to his heart's content. And then he needn't see very much of her if they didn't get on well together,—which was possible. For she was a woman of a very independent sense. Too much so, perhaps. She might want to have her own way too much. Possibly might not allow him as much money as he wanted. And gradually the converse of the previous satisfactory picture came before his mind. And he saw himself tied for life to a woman whom he should be more or less ashamed to take upon his arm into a room. If she bullied

him, everyone would say that he deserved it, for marrying her for her money. Every year she would grow plainer; and he more irritable, probably, at being obliged to live with her. There could be no sentiment about such a marriage. And marriage without sentiment was repugnant to his ideas upon the subject. There would be none of that domestic bliss which he had been accustomed to associate with married life. And then that other face rose to reproach him with his temporary inconstancy, and he exclaimed half aloud, "What a brute I am!" as he lapsed into a contemplation of such a life as he had often pictured to himself with her.

The heiress and her deer park faded out of sight, pecuniary difficulties were forgotten, and he dropped off to sleep in that dreamy state of delicious thought which, I suppose, it is worth being in love to enjoy.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lady Belvedere's party broke up at the end of the week, and Harry stayed on for a few days longer. London was not so attractive that he was eager to get back to his lodgings all at once, if he could find an asylum from his duns elsewhere.

"Do you know, I think you have made an impression already on Cornelia Grant," said Lady Belvedere, as they were sitting together on the evening after the others had gone away.

Harry laughed. Had he?

"She was really quite put out that evening, they say, when Planchette wrote your name. And she wouldn't have cared, if she had not thought that it was true."

"I'm afraid she is too old, Aunt Eleanor," Harry said, with a laugh.

"Oh! not at all! And she is very pleasant,—don't you think?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, carelessly.

"If you take care, and play your cards well, you may be master of Broughton some day yet. You should bear that in mind."

Harry promised that he would; and the idea would turn up, uncalled for, every now and then, although, indeed, it interested him but very slightly.

And Blanche? Was she, too, thinking of the prospective advantages of a mercenary marriage?

The winter had been spent in the usual routine of country-house visiting or receiving visitors at home, and Charlie had with difficulty been restrained by his mother from asking Egerton to join the shooting party at Mottistone in this very week. He was happier, perhaps, at Belvedere. If he had gone to Mottistone, he would only have laid in a stock of jealousy to add to the other tormenting thoughts which usually occupied his mind.

In more than one house where Blanche and her mother had been, they had come

across an old Cambridge friend of Charlie's, who, from being my Lord Rochfort originally, had now, owing to his father's death, developed into the Most Noble the Marquis of Galston.

Sweet innocent! he was so unconscious of his accession of rank, oh! so unconscious! notwithstanding the pains which old and young ladies, chaperones and daughters, had taken to impress the fact upon his mind.

My lord Galston had been asked everywhere during the previous season; had dined with every duchess who had a daughter to marry; was the idol of all the Lady Emily L'Estranges, the delighted receptacle of smiling welcomes from every young lady to whom he kindly gave his arm in a ball-room; he was run after by dowagers, who grovelled to his coronet; he was courted, flattered, loaded with invitations; and the dear young man stood it all so well,—oh! so well! his head had not been turned,—not turned at all; oh, no! not in the least!

And yet Egerton used to say, "It's the greatest joke! That fellow, Rochfort, now that he's become a bloated marquis, hardly condescends to speak to me when we meet. He seems to think himself the only man in London."

There were found others, too, who would endorse this opinion, who said that they couldn't stand the airs which he assumed, and who snubbed him on every occasion.

But what did it matter? Huntress chaperones still laid traps for him, baited with their daughters, coursed him, ran him to ground, and prostrated themselves before his marquisate, regardless of the indifference with which he sometimes treated them. Young ladies still smiled upon him as he approached, and threw over more lively partners without remorse when he proposed to dance with them. This, however, he did not very often do. His enemies said that Rochfort was above that amusement now; that he liked to think that everyone was eager to dance with him, only that he didn't care to gratify them. So he stood outside the door, looking interest-

ingly bored, and conversed with other elder sons, who, being well-known quarries, liked to avoid the attentions of the chaperones within. And here he would be good enough to recognise an old acquaintance, such as Egerton, by a word now and then.

Egerton was bold enough to laugh at him to his face, and give him his little finger, or address him as my Lord Marquis, or, "haw, Galston, hope I see you well." And the noble creature didn't like such unceremonious treatment, and grew still more distant, to Harry's infinite amusement.

But he always had a large circle of admirers to fall back upon,—men who thought it a very desirable thing to be seen in his company, or speaking to him in the park, on terms of intimacy with so great a *parti*,—so that there was no fear of his self-respect diminishing through the indifference of unappreciating persons like Egerton.

There were people who said that it was the greatest pity in the world that he had not been subjected to the training of one of

the household regiments; that such a course would, at this period of his life, have been of inestimable advantage to him.

But what did Galston want with a profession? Life was much more enjoyable with nothing to do. So he lounged in and out of White's, and delighted the old fellows there with his swagger; sauntered about the park on the arm of some acknowledged *beau*, thinking of nothing but himself, and how the eyes of the chairs and carriages followed him as he passed, fancying that everyone was pointing him out to his neighbour,—"That's Galston!" "Look at Galston!" "Wouldn't you like to be Galston?"

There were also other little peculiarities about him, which some people affected to dislike. He was by way of knowing none but the *crême de la crême* of society, and would at once leave any older friend, if any more distinguished acquaintance approached. He always liked to be seen talking confidentially to the smartest women; and when he did dance, it was only with girls of acknowledged popularity. Good gracious! Do

you suppose Lord Galston was going to make himself common?

A year or two, as you will observe, had effected an immense improvement in him,—and this was the easier of accomplishment, in that he had been a very good fellow to start with. However, it cannot be expected that there will not be differences of opinion upon every subject, and I shouldn't wonder now if somebody might be found to say that a more egregious ass did not exist in London; that he was nothing but a poor puppy; and that they could put their fingers on several at this moment who belonged to the same litter. It is quite curious and interesting to see how strangely opinions do differ sometimes.

However, his lordship had met Blanche Villars in more than one country house of late, and had been good enough to bestow upon her a very unusual share of his kind attention.

Perhaps the indifference with which she received it piqued him into persistence, for Lord Galston's advances were not wont to be

received in this manner. But Blanche was one of the happily few young ladies who were blind to the extraordinary merits of an empty coronet. And though she never snubbed him,—for it was not her nature,—she never gave him the slightest encouragement to throw away his attentions upon her. I believe that, in her heart of hearts, so far from being interested by him, she held him in very much the same contempt as that which his prejudiced enemies were wont to entertain for him.

But Lady Mary had noticed all that was going on; and, anxious to give her an opportunity of liking him if she could, had asked him to Mottistone for this week.

Charlie had not seen him since his return to England, and was glad at the prospect of seeing an old friend, who would remind him of his Cambridge days, and who was such a good fellow, too, as he remembered him. It was not, however, so easy to make him see how desirable it was that his sister should forget, if possible, her unfortunate attachment to his impecunious friend. But he

yielded, at last, to his mother's superior intelligence in such matters, ready to acquiesce in anything that might be to Blanche's advantage, and Galston, accordingly, turned up in due course at Mottistone.

What a pleasant surprise for Charlie his newly-acquired manner was; such a charming change from the noisy, jovial, good fellow that he used to be! After he had been in the house for a day and a night they were inseparable. Nothing he could fancy more delightful than to have him for a brother-in-law. And Galston seemed only to want the slightest possible encouragement to arrange it all as he wished. Of course he had only to ask. Who would refuse him—a marquis, and the Marquis of Galston? Ha! ha! What an idea!

He had been left accidentally one evening sitting alone with Blanche, apart from the rest of the people in the room, and was talking to her in the low confidential tone of voice which he liked to adopt on occasions of the kind. It looked interesting.

"Your brother seems to have got over

his disappointment of last year," he was saying, looking over to the piano in the next room, where Charlie was laughing gaily with other members of the party.

"Yes," answered Blanche; "I'm so glad to see that he has. Poor boy! it was a dreadful blow to him at first. Do you know that odious Mr. Murray? Don't you think he behaved shamefully?"

Galston hesitatingly thought that he had. He didn't really. If he had been asked for his real sentiments on the subject, he would have said that she was a deuced fine girl, and if she wanted to marry him, why shouldn't he do it?

Blanche waxed indignant at the bare recollection of the circumstances, and a little, perhaps, at Galston's hesitating assent.

"I can't tell you how I despise him," she said. "I don't think his wife was half so bad as he was."

"Was she a friend of yours?"

'At one time she was. She isn't now."

"You don't object, then, to her having

thrown your brother over, so much as to the man who married her?"

"Object! Of course I do. I think inconstancy in a woman is atrocious;" and Blanche thought of a constant woman's love that she knew but too well; "but treachery to a friend is much worse."

"I suppose it is," Galston said, not having considered the question. "But I thought ladies were allowed to change their minds."

"But not to break their word; or to pretend to be in love with one man, and make him wretched by marrying another."

"Your brother would have been rather young to marry, wouldn't he? No place, or anything of that kind?"

"I dare say he would. I'm very glad now that he hasn't."

"My mother wants me to marry," continued Galston, turning over the leaves of an album which lay under his hand, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the contents. "They tell me that I ought to settle down and look after my property."

"Why don't you, then?" Blanche answered, carelessly.

He looked up at her, and thought to himself, "She's a schemer after all! Wants to draw me on by pretending not to understand."

"Well, I don't know," he said, aloud. "It's rather early in life to settle down. What do you think?" and he glanced inquiringly into her face for an answer.

"Really, Lord Galston," she replied, "you must know best yourself. I dare say you would make a very good country gentleman. And you might make yourself very useful in your county. So that I should think it's not a bit too early, if you say your property requires looking after."

After a moment's pause, she rose, suggesting that they should go and see what the others were doing in the next room, and moved off in that direction.

Galston remained for a moment or two, watching her retreating form and digesting his thoughts. A few moments after he was doing the condescending to some other fair,

who appreciated his favourable notice more than Blanche did.

"Charming song, Lady Edith, you gave us just now."

Lady Edith's mother, who has been sitting next to her, gets up and retires upon some small pretence to the other end of the room, leaving her place vacant for Lord Galston, who, however, does not avail himself of it.

"Ah! you sing a great deal, I dare say," he continued, stroking his moustache.

Lady Edith, a timid young thing, replies that she does sing a good deal. Is Lord Galston fond of music?

Lord Galston is fond of—haw!—the opera;—haw!—has his stall there, and looks in when there's anything good going on. "You go to the opera, of course, Lady Edith?" stretching his arms to bring down the wristbands and links.

"Not very often," Lady Edith says; "it's so dreadfully expensive."

It is very possible that it may be so; but Lord Galston's expression implies that he is

quite above such contemptible considerations, and he saunters on towards the piano, where Blanche is playing, and whither his attention has been attracted all the time he has been talking.

"Not coming up to town to-morrow, Villars?" he says to Charlie—who, by the way, he had never called Villars at Cambridge.

No. Villars was not aware of any such intention, particularly as the shooting was not yet over.

"Are you not going to stay till the end of the week?" he asked.

"Well, you see, the E——s (mentioning a smart duke and duchess) want me to go to them this week." Certain royalties, whom he designated, were to be there, and, "Ah! one ought to go, I suppose."

"Oh! of course you ought to be there," said Villars, not being (curiously enough) as grieved as one might have expected at Galston's proposed departure, which he now mentioned for the first time. "They couldn't get on without you, I should

think." His lordship feebly smiled—he thought they couldn't. And he took his leave accordingly next day, rather glad to be able to make a kind of small sensation by going away before the rest, to bask in the smiles of royalty. He thought, too, that he was punishing Blanche for holding him so cheap, by withdrawing for a time his favour. Most sweet monster! how you did delude your poor self-satisfied mind! Just as if Blanche cared one atom whether you went or stayed! Just as if her heart was not far too deeply pledged elsewhere, even to entertain any feeling but contempt for such a puppy of conceit as your own fatiguing self! The only thing which makes you interesting at all is your fortunately comparative rarity. Such fully-developed puppyism is happily not often to be met with, although London boasts of many very promising specimens, and will do its best, no doubt, to train them up to your own engaging standard.

CHAPTER XV.

If Philip Egerton had only known that his brother was in love, and that his present prospects precluded all hope of any consummation to it, what an additional inducement it would have been to him to interest himself in Harry's affairs! If by any efforts of his the completion of his happiness could have been secured, you may be sure that he would not have spared them. If the unearthing of this assumed deception, at which he had so nearly arrived, could have contributed in any way to furthering any hope which his brother might foolishly have entertained of ultimately marrying, such a possible result to his exertions would without doubt have given an extra spur to Philip's energy. But he didn't know it. He mixed but little in the

gossip of the world, and therefore he had never heard Harry's name mentioned in connection with the most popular girl in London.

For the present, therefore, all he had to stimulate his interest, was the comparatively tame expectation of proving him to have no claim upon his father's generosity, and what was quite as important, no title to his mother's fortune.

The depreciation of Harry's position, and the perhaps rather sweet feeling of gratified animosity, would be all the satisfaction which he could as yet expect to derive from an elucidation of the mystery hinted at by the attorney. Still, even these considerations were sufficient to induce Philip to proceed. And for some time he had been very sanguine of success—speedy success, too, he wished, and therefore thought.

All, however, had not gone quite so smoothly as he expected, and he had been obliged to moderate his transports of anticipation.

For some weeks his emissary (whom he

had been compelled to pay all the time) had made but little advance in his investigations, and you may be sure made the most of what he did do. The ground, he said, was so beset with difficulties that progress was necessarily slow. The deceased attorney's house was still retained by the old man who was the object of Philip's interest, and until he could find out the sort of man he had to deal with, it was useless to attempt an interview. But his inquiries in the neighbourhood had failed to elicit much information respecting the relations which had subsisted between him and Flint. They had been known as a close and mysterious pair—the survivor seldom seen out of the house, the other tolerably well known about the criminal courts, where he picked up garbage practice. Strange and ill-clad men and women had been seen from time to time visiting the house, and the principal haunts of vice were supposed to be not unacquainted with the cunning face and appearance of old Flint.

The old man, at any rate, was not his

partner, for his name was not to be found in the Law List, wherein Mr. Flint did figure. A confidential clerk he might have been, and probably was; but how far he had shared his master's confidence it was impossible to say, for no one but themselves knew anything of the interior of that house. Whatever papers, money, or documents the attorney had left, had been taken possession of by the survivor, and nobody had appeared to question his right. So much information had, with some skill and difficulty, the detective said, been obtained from the old woman, who was the sole remaining occupant of the house with himself. No one, she said, had been admitted since her late master's death; and as to the terms upon which the two had lived together—upon that point she had little or nothing to say. They had lived the same as long as she had been there, and that was a many years.

In the character of a former client the detective at length obtained admission to the house. Here, also, according to his own

account, considerable cleverness had been shown. The old man had seen him through the window, had shuffled papers and documents, over which he was poring, into a corner, and had opened the door himself, scrutinising him narrowly through the couple of inches which he opened.

He was sharp, short, and sour, this old man. What was his visitor's business? he asked, in the curtest possible form of expression.

He had come to see Attorney Flint, was the reply.

"Dead!" and he proceeded to shut the door; but the other inserted the end of his stick, and showed such good and specious reasons for a further interview that he was permitted, at last, to enter the dingy office where Philip's expectations had been so recently aroused. But so taciturn, so watchful, and so uncommunicative had the old man been, that the former client had been able to form only a general idea of the extent to which his knowledge of the other's business had gone; but, for his employer's comfort, he told him that a man would re-

quire to have a head upon his shoulders, and a very sharp one too, to get anything out of that old sinner, from the little he had seen of him. His silence was only relieved by monosyllables. And if Flint was the name of the other, flint was the nature of this one. He might, of course, be open to money; that would very easily be seen.

Philip took several days to turn over this intelligence in his mind, and, after all, he thought he could have found out quite as much for himself; and yet perhaps not. There would have been several little difficulties in the way; and so he hesitated whether it might not be more advisable to intrust to the detective the nature of the information which he believed and hoped this man was possessed of, and to leave it to his more practised acuteness to work the business. But, after some deliberation, he determined that, as he had found out so much about the character of the man with whom he had to deal, it would be more satisfactory, and far less expensive, to manage it for himself. He thought he was quite as cunning as any detective, and that,

as he had got so much (how much ?) out of his former visit, and all for nothing too, he might be as successful with this man also. Besides, it would be much better not to have a third party in the concern, and much more gratifying to think that it would be entirely his own cleverness which had sifted it all, and overcome crafty attorneys. Philip had not a doubt but what this old man had shared the other's confidence, and would be equally willing to part with his intelligence for a consideration. This it would be Philip's business, of course, to reduce as far as possible. There were several little circumstances which now recurred to his mind, which confirmed him in this view. He had heard voices whispering in the adjoining room on his first visit. There were but these two men in the house. The other, of course, was listening while the attorney was being, as Philip now flattered himself, pumped by him. There must have been an explanation afterwards. Then he had all his papers. Oh, yes ! there could be no doubt about it. And so Philip informed his

agent that he should not require his services any further, and then paused for a time to consider how best the matter might be managed.

What a pity it was that Harry knew nothing of the active interest which Philip was showing in his behalf! It might have given him employment for his mind, some occupation for his thoughts. He needed something, for his leisure hung very heavy on hand. The greater part of the morning he used to lie in bed, in order to pass the time and make the day a little shorter. His naturally active temperament was beginning more and more to resent the enforced indolence to which he had been condemned by his father; and as he lay gazing up at the ceiling one morning, a few days after his return from Belvedere, he felt inclined almost to loathe himself for the droning, useless existence which he was passing. The idea of reading for the general improvement of his mind, and with no definite end, had no more entered into his head than it ever does into any other head in a similar

situation. It was a profession which he sighed for, and which there seemed no hope of his ever attaining. And as there was no use thinking about what apparently would never come to pass, he turned listlessly round on his way to the floor, and took up the letters which hitherto had lain neglected on the table close by. He never was in a hurry now to take up his correspondence. They were pretty sure to be urgent applications for payment in consequence of heavy settlements to be made; and it was just as well to put off as long as possible the recognition of that well-known angular hand, and its large blue envelope. This morning, however, his post was not quite so uninteresting. There was, among the others, a letter from Maud Greville, which he unfolds and lays upon the table before him, as he sits upon the side of his bed and brushes his hair.

"Ho! ho!" he exclaimed after reading the first two or three lines,—and the operation of hair-brushing is suspended while he gives his undivided attention to the letter. "So you are going to be married, my little

cousin, are you? Well, I'm very glad to hear it, Maud," he adds, as he finishes reading. "It doesn't do a girl any good larking about Leicestershire half the year, as you've been doing."

Mrs. Greville, perhaps, held the same opinion; but Maud thought otherwise, and consequently her mother's weak protests were not much attended to. Besides, Mr. Egerton liked her to accompany him; he liked to hear people praise her riding; and as he had given up going very straight himself, in her (except when she broke away from him) he always had a companion. As long as any arrangement was agreeable to himself, Mr. Egerton was contented, and not to be contradicted. All other considerations were perfectly irrelevant. And yet if anyone had told him that he was a selfish man, he would have been just as indignant as you or I would be, if such an unpleasant accusation was brought against us.

"Lady Farringford, eh?" said Harry to himself, as he resumed his toilet, and tried to picture Maud in the position of a married

woman. They would be a pair of good riders anyhow, he thought, as he recalled his previous knowledge of her future lord in the hunting field.

It was, in fact, her riding, culminating in that run from Ranksborough Gorse, which had won this Centaur's heart. No man, with a soul for hunting and a budding tenderness for herself, could have avoided committing himself after the way she had gone on that day. And the first quiet ride home after the frost had settled it all.

Maud, of course, wrote in rapturous terms of himself, his riding, his handsomeness, his charms of every kind, and made him out to be so everything which could possibly be desired in a husband, that it was no wonder she was the happiest creature upon earth. They were to have a house in London, too, and to be married in April, and Harry would of course be there, &c., &c., &c.

"I'll take odds I'm not," soliloquised Harry, "if my father's there."

"House in London, though! Suit me very well to dine with them occasionally,"

he thought. And then, after a moment or two, he added the corollary, "How very mean one becomes, being always in want of money! Why doesn't somebody die and leave me a fortune?"

But no one appearing likely to do so just at present, he proceeded in the afternoon to work out his own, as he thought, at Tattersall's. Lincoln Spring Meeting was close at hand, and here he proposed to begin his campaign for the season. Another *douceur* from Lady Belvedere had provided him with a small basis of operations, so that he should not be quite in so nervous a position as during his last week at Newmarket.

His Derby book, too, looked promising, notwithstanding a few rumours which had been industriously circulated of late respecting one or two of the animals upon which he had particularly pinned his faith. Rumours of legs having given way, of roaring, and other such-like *canards*, with which ingenious tricksters work the betting market to their own advantage or the profit of their employers; rumours very often spread about by

the owners of the horses themselves, in order that they may reap a harvest of ill-gotten gains by the deliberate deception of the public. There is very little to choose now between owners of horses and the dregs of the betting ring. They vie with each other to try which can descend the lowest in the art of trickery and swindling. And *gentlemen* seem rather to pride themselves upon not being outdone in blackguardism by professional thieves and pickpockets. It is a truly noble pastime, is our national sport nowadays! No wonder they are trying to get it up in France. The science of knavery is worth any nation's while to encourage; and England may feel justly proud of having been the first to introduce it.

There was a small attendance and not much business doing at the rooms; and Harry, after booking a bet or two, turned out for a solitary constitutional in Kensington Gardens. It was a bright, clear February afternoon. The air was fresh, exhilarating, and bracing, and the rays of the sun, as he sat down by the round sheet of water near the

palace, shot down upon the place with a cheering warmth. Water-fowl innumerable were receiving their daily bread from the hands of nursery-maids and children in the distance. Wild ducks were swooping round the pool, and sending up little sparkling jets as they came down with a swish into the water. Sleek mallards glided along the shores, or plumed their glossy feathers upon the banks, calling up pleasant memories of the wild lochs and reedy pools of Scotland. Children, flushed with healthy exercise, trundled their hoops past him with noisy gaiety, and dirty little boys caught glistening little fish with the delight and enjoyment of sun-begotten spirits. The old trees stood out picturesque and dark in the slant rays of the declining sun; and all nature, animal and human, seemed conspiring to rejoice in the brightness of the day and the freshness of the atmosphere.

Harry sat like a philosopher gazing upon the gambols of the children, and listening to the merry voices and the sounds of happiness and mirth which filled the air, and

wondered why it was his lot to be more or less miserable when everything else seemed so light-hearted and full of joy.

"Rather hard lines," he murmured to himself, as he contemplated his position, and fancied himself the most unfortunate victim of an adverse fate or father's cruelty. "That old woman is probably about as happy as I am," he thought, as his eyes fell upon a haggard-looking creature who was approaching, with the evident intention of asking for assistance. For the moment she saw that she was observed, a shiver ran through her ragged frame, and a groan issued from within, telling a tale of misery which no words could have conveyed so adequately. "She thinks, because I'm respectably dressed and look like a gentleman, that I must be happy," Harry went on to think. "Happy!" he half ejaculated bitterly, as she made an attempt to attract his attention. "As if one's clothes were any index to one's happiness!" And he cut short his meditations to listen to the usual tale of hunger and distress, children at home starv-

ing, husband unable to get work, and so forth.

"What is your husband?" he asked, feeling a certain interest in what seemed at least a lower scale of misery than his own.

The question was answered glibly enough, and was supplemented by an imaginary history of all the troubles of their past life.

What was it in this woman's features which seemed familiar to him he was wondering as he looked attentively at the blear-eyed, wrinkled face. Why it must be —and he stopped half-way, and smiled at the absurdity of the thought. She spoke in a Scotch accent, and he asked if she came from Scotland.

Thinking that she had found a countryman, whose sympathies might be marketable, the woman dilated upon her bonny country to some purpose. Harry liked her attachment to her native land, and said he supposed that if he gave her money she would only spend it in drink.

Drink! What a righteous horror her face assumed at the bare suggestion! Not

a drop ever passed her lips. As she was a living woman, it was the truth. When she had not bread to put in the children's mouths, how could she get the money to drink, indeed? And a sob came naturally forth at the thought of the starving little ones and the poor crippled husband. Neither of these, believe me, had any existence except in the fancy of this ragged female, who had been for some time past the victim of afflicted husbands—husbands who had but just left the hospital—husbands worn to a shadow with fever—husbands willing, but unable, to get work; in fact, there was not an affliction hardly to which a husband could be liable which this unfortunate woman had not experienced in the partner of her choice; and they had been served up in every conceivable variety of form, according as she thought they would suit the benevolent palate of the object of her solicitations for the time being.

A half-crown being the smallest change which Egerton could find at the moment, he gave it to her. Money was no object to

him. As long as there was no immediate necessity for economy, economy was a bore. The woman seemed badly off enough, and it was pleasant to think that he made another less miserable, even if he couldn't do it for himself. He turned towards the town, therefore, with a lighter step, leaving the woman pouring out her thanks after him, thinking him rather a fool for his pains, but feeling, perhaps, a little touch of real gratitude at the bottom of it all; for Harry had a very pleasant, kind manner in doing a kindness, and the woman was a woman after all,—although she did trudge off with her newly-acquired wealth to the nearest public-house, and expend the greater part of it in gin, or other liquor of a similarly generous and stimulating nature. But he couldn't get her face out of his head. He must have seen her somewhere before, though he couldn't for the life of him remember where. And the features continued to haunt him, as features do which have suggested a previous acquaintance, particulars of which the memory refuses to supply.

It was a strange coincidence, that while Philip Egerton was laying deep and crafty plans for the circumvention of the secret which he believed was hidden in Shoreditch —that while he was plotting for the coveted discovery Harry Egerton should have innocently come across the one person who could have told him more about it than any number of attorneys or their survivors in Shoreditch or elsewhere.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE turf season of 186— commenced under favourable auspices for, at all events, one backer of horses, and Harry Egerton returned from Lincoln much encouraged to proceed with his speculations at the very next meeting.

Having confined himself so far to such limited enterprise as became the circumscribed nature of the funds at his command, his winnings had not been considerable. But to have won at all was an encouraging beginning. And it was possibly just a little satisfactory not to be obliged to borrow more money from his friends for the settlement of his account. He didn't, however, consider it necessary to pay any outstanding debts of this nature. He had become accustomed to them now. Familiarity had blunted that

fine sense of shame which a few months before would have caused him to blush at the thought of leaving a debt of honour unpaid, or an obligation neglected. If he had thought that any of his victims were in immediate want of money, he would no doubt have made a sacrifice to accommodate his friend by repaying any former loan. But Manners, for instance; there was no occasion to hurry in paying him; he had lots of money, and waiting would make very little difference to him. Experience, too, had taught him that it was unwise to pay anything that was not absolutely necessary, for at any moment some immediate crisis might arise which would require prompt attention; and under those circumstances it would be unpleasant to find himself without the necessary resources. Repayment, therefore, was always put off indefinitely; at last, with scarcely any feeling of compunction at all. Villars, however, was never included in his list of victims. Something instinctively told him that real friendship could only exist upon equal terms. The idea of making use of his

friend was repulsive to his sentimental notions. So whenever Charlie, hearing that he was hard pressed by some unfeeling dun, had insisted upon lending him money, Egerton had always refused, laughed perhaps, and said that it was nothing new to him being up a tree—that he should probably get out of this fix just as he had out of many others equally impracticable; and then he turned the subject, with a feigned indifference, to some other topic. But he was not always able to hide, under an assumed carelessness, the anxiety which sometimes poisoned his very existence. Nor could he always stifle the suggestions of his better nature which would make itself heard occasionally, in disagreeable allusions to the habits into which he was drifting in regard to money. But they were generally set at rest by the consideration that it was his father's fault—that he ought not to have driven him to the sort of life he was leading; and he would busy himself upon his prospects for the Derby, when he was going to win no end of

money (for his luck, he said, undoubtedly had changed), and when he should pay off everything.

It must be borne in mind that when this exemplary young man goes and stakes money which he does not possess, and does other things of a similarly questionable nature, it is not necessarily from a want of moral courage to resist the excitement of gambling. There is a great difference between the want of moral courage, and the want of the principle which should prompt the exercise of it. Egerton had plenty of the former, but necessity had gradually dulled the latter; and his recklessness was, therefore, a deliberate act—the only way which promised to extricate him from his Slough of Despond.

What the conscientious reader might stigmatise as unprincipled, Philip Egerton called swindling, and told Harry so to his face when he met him—for Philip had returned to London, and was busy, very busy indeed, with his engagements. And looking down from the virtuous height upon which his own

easy circumstances had placed him in this respect, he congratulated Harry sarcastically upon his accession of wealth, seeing that he could afford to live as he was doing; and threw out a dark hint about the possibility of his being worse off some day, when Harry said that perhaps Philip would do the same if he was in his position.

No, Philip was thankful to say, he had not descended quite so low in the scale of human degradation, and passed on his way rejoicing in his own superior virtue. Of course he thought it his duty to communicate to his father that his graceless son had returned to his old courses directly the season commenced—incorrigible! very sad! such want of principle! and Philip was overcome with quite an edifying sorrow as he mentioned it.

So Harry lived well, and threw his money about; booked more bets on the Derby; tore up bills with a gay indifference; spent his money freely when he had it, and when he had not, borrowed more, and spent that freely too; was a constant frequenter of

Tattersall's, and voted betting to be the finest occupation going.

"By ——, yes!" replied Castleton, to whom the latter observation was made, as they were returning together from the rooms the week after Lincoln. "As long as you can manage to hit those —— ring-men."

They were on their way to a rendezvous in St. James's, where members of the household regiments and others do congregate towards evening, 'to laugh and chaff and quaff much sherry.'

Castleton was greeted with a chorus of exclamations as he entered. Why in town? Why not hunting? Leave not over, &c.

"Came back to the —— place this morning," he said, shaking hands with one or two near the door.

"How about the Grand National, Jerry?" exclaimed Harry's yacht companion, Skindles, with whom he was very much more on a par now in the matter of principle than when they had discoursed upon duns and debts on board Manners' yacht.

Must win, bar accidents, Castleton said,

and proceeded to show many horsey reasons why such a conclusion was inevitable.

Much horse was talked for several minutes now. The animals which were to run against Castleton were discussed and despatched; the City and Suburban asserted by some confident young subaltern to be a foregone conclusion; and various other confident opinions given upon various other races by various other young subalterns, who knew equally little about the subject, and upon whom much innocuous satire was expended by the non-horsey men in the room.

"You'll give us a dinner, Jerry, if you pull it off?" says one.

"And I'll ask the ladies for you," chimes in another. And the claims of various ladies are then discussed.

"Greenwich or Richmond? May as well fix the day at once."

"You're a devilish good fellow, my lord. You'll do it well, I haven't a doubt. Don't spare the expense on my account. I can always drink champagne when there's nothing better."

Castleton, in powerful language, assured them that the dinner should be forthcoming, but that the race was not yet won.

"You'll settle my account, of course, if you don't win!" shouted Skindles. "I shall back you for my little all, which ain't much, by the way."

"I've put my tailor on a hundred to nothing on Black Prince, Jerry!" cried another younger son, who kept his brougham and various other appendages on three hundred a year and his pay.

"Talking of tailors," said Skindles; "the impudence of these fellows! 'Pon my soul, I think, you know, one oughtn't to stand it. Poole actually had the cheek to send me in his bill again this morning; and I'll swear I paid him over a hundred not more than a couple of years ago, when I joined."

"Scandalous!" exclaimed a neighbouring friend, who even laughed as he spoke.

"No, but really it's too bad," said Skindles, seriously hurt at the insult which had been offered to his character for punctuality. "I'm sure I'm always only too ready to

consider my tradesmen to any reasonable extent; but this, you know, really—eh?" And the serio-comic expression with which he turned to his audience provoked much laughter from his neighbours.

"Speak to him seriously," suggested one. "Say you'll withdraw your patronage if it occurs again."

"He might not take that as unkindly as it was meant. It's all very well to assume the d—n-it-sir-what-do-you-mean air if you can pay up on the spot; but otherwise it might be inconvenient."

"Yes. Don't be rash, Skindles, old fellow," said another. "It'd be a bore if you had to get rid of that neat little turn-out of yours. Take my advice, don't be too severe upon him."

The attention of the party here became fixed upon a bumptious young Life Guardsman, who had but recently joined, and who, being rather proud of his lordship, was undergoing the requisite amount of chaff and more substantial training to fit him for taking his position in society as a gentleman.

It had occurred to some individual, whose ingenuity had been sharpened by successive glasses of sherry, that it might be a diversion to draw this haw-haw young man; and, in furtherance of this laudable design, his chair had been smartly withdrawn from under him, and his person deposited, with more velocity than comfort, upon the hard floor.

The noble blood boiled up at once; and, swelling with a glorious passion, he rushed upon the foe.

But, alas! an outstretched leg again lays him prostrate on the floor, when almost within reach of his grinning prey. Another tormentor seizes him by the arms, another by the legs, and he is laid struggling upon the table. The glasses are moved to one side, and toco then and there administered—a young Foot Guardsman taking so much delight in the operation, that it was thought desirable for him to undergo the same himself. Bolting, however, under the table to escape, another is pushed down on top of him, and a general bear-fight is substituted. A glass or two having been broken, and the hair of

the younger heads having been sufficiently dishevelled, the meeting was broken up—one or two to St. John's Wood, one or two more to eat oysters at Wilton's, others to an early dinner and pantomime, others to dress for mess, and others wherever a listless and erratic nose might lead them.

Harry, for his part, went home to dress and dawdle before dining on guard at St. James's, with Skindles of her Majesty's Foot Guards, who had been his companion the previous week at Lincoln.

The colonel in command for that night happening to be a racing man, the conversation again was of the horse horsey; and as Egerton's existence now was bound up in sporting concerns, he had full occupation for his interest during the whole of dinner.

How that young and silent cornet envied their knowledge upon racing topics! and how he looked forward to the day when he should be able to talk with equal assurance upon such an engrossing subject!

"I saw your father in Leicestershire the other day," said the colonel, from the top

of the table, to Egerton after dinner. "I thought he was looking older a good deal."

"Yes. He isn't as young as he was," answered Harry, as though he had seen him frequently during the winter.

"Have you deserted the country altogether? I don't remember seeing you out this year."

No, Harry said, he had not actually deserted it, but he had not been down there this season.

And then another man asked if it wasn't true his cousin was going to marry Farringford. "By ——, he's a —— fine rider!" (The speaker was a brother officer of Castleton's.) "That race he won at Melton last year was a —— fine performance, when he beat that —— Compton's head off! I was —— glad of it, too."

The colonel complimented the last speaker on his vocabulary, and some one else asked him what else he could expect from ——; and the conversation proceeded upon steeplechasing and indifferent topics, intermitted with an occasional sneeze from Marengo's

hoof, until the clock approached the hour of eleven. The cavalry then clank away to their den at the Horse Guards, and leave the young Foot Guardsmen to make merry at their expense behind their backs, and plume themselves upon their own superior conversational powers.

Egerton strolls away with another plain-clothes guest, and looks in at a drum in St. James's Square.

Parliament had been opened some time before; the world was returning to town, and the streets now gave up acquaintances at every corner. The days were getting longer, and the winter dreariness seemed to be almost over; and a good thing too, Harry thought. Lady Belvedere also had returned to town, although her nephew was not aware of the fact until he saw her this evening in her place in society. Having only arrived in London two days before, she had not lost much time in resuming her active gaiety.

"So I hear Maud is going to be married to Lord Farringford," she said, after greeting Harry with as much cordiality as it was her

manner to show. "How lucky to get such a *parti!*"

Lady Belvedere knew exactly what his income then was, and what it would be when his father died. And she was able to indulge in various conjectures as to what house his father would assign to him for his establishment, and to provide Harry with many other particulars respecting him which he had not previously known.

Had Cornelia Grant been in town? she asked, with a sly smile. No. Ah! she must see what could be done after Easter. What had he been doing since he left Belvedere? Was his father in town? She supposed not. He would not probably be very much interested in his movements.

"I don't suppose they will make much difference to me," Harry said, resignedly. "Philip is in town, but we don't see much of each other."

Oh! but, Lady Belvedere said, it was foolish of him to quarrel with his brother; he might be of service to him with his father.

"Not much chance of that," Harry said. "I believe he rather tries to set him against me. I think he'd be rather glad if I came to grief altogether. I'm ready enough to be civil, but one can't stand being called a swindler, you know, Aunt Eleanor."

"But why should he apply such an epithet to you, my dear?" she asked.

"Merely because he heard that I was betting the other day."

"But you can't afford to bet, can you?" asked his aunt.

"But I won."

"And if you were to lose?"

"Time enough to think about that when I do," Harry rejoined, with an uneasy laugh.

"You'll be getting yourself into some scrape if you don't take care," Lady Belvedere said. "You must come to dine with me to-morrow. I want to introduce you to my niece. She is going out with me this season. Mind, I don't want you to fall in love with her; for she has no money, and so you see it wouldn't do. We shall go to the play afterwards, and you can be our

beau." Another friend of her ladyship's came up at this moment, and Harry passed on to other acquaintances, whom he found sprinkled about the rooms.

Before Easter this may be done, and a certain amount of rational conversation may be enjoyed. The shy young man, who does not appreciate the joys of a thin company, where he knows very few people, and where he fancies himself the object of general observation, will find after-Easter society more to his taste. He is then lost in the crowd. And since his hands are jammed down to his sides by the pressure of surrounding bodies, he is relieved from the necessity of finding occupation for them, and may give himself up to the real enjoyment of society—may then feel the intense satisfaction of knowing that he is really a London man—that he is actually in the midst of the engrossing delights of fashionable life—delicious sensation!

Traditions of the past tell of a time when these pleasures were less toilsome than they are now, and when it was possible to ex-

change ideas at leisure without fear of rude disturbing human waves, which surge around, and carry you off *conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris*, even though you may be large of stature and firm of foot. They hold up to one's regret the memories of a time when you were not hurried on in the middle of a sentence to be grounded upon some other friend, who in her turn listens for a moment to your jerked-out utterances, until you are again borne on, and again the unfinished sentence dies upon the stifling air. Perhaps there are diverse currents setting through a doorway, and you meet your dearest friend but to be torn rudely from his embrace, *invalidasque tibi tendens, heu! non tua, palmas*, you are hurried on with the flow, while he drifts back upon the ebb. At another time you espy, from the bottom of a stair, the dear object for whom you have sacrificed your digestive calm, standing far out of your reach on the topmost step, firmly wedged, moving only as the current moves, and ever receding farther and still farther from your ravished gaze. To make head against the

stream you know is hopeless. Oh for an eddy to carry you alongside! But no. You must go on, and through, and out again, and you arrive just in time to see her, from your reversed position at the top, on her way to her carriage below. Society is surely a seductive mistress. No wonder she has so many devoted worshippers at her shrine!

It would, however, be a curious speculation for an Epicurean philosopher to consider what natural law is fulfilled, or what end all-powerful Nature intended to further by that deliberate concourse of atoms which constitutes a "drum." Whether it may not perhaps have been an ingenious device for the shortening of life, or for preventing the human race from becoming too numerous—too numerous in proportion to other races of animals who have not the reason which would prompt them to take delight in such combinations for mutual destruction and disfigurement. Time might be as profitably wasted upon the consideration of a question of this kind as upon any other branch of purely speculative inquiry.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARCH is again president of the year. Let anyone dispute his sway, refuse to wear his uniform of proof, affect to brave the terrors of his tyrant rule, and ruthless gusts of cutting wind will lie in wait round every corner and seize upon him as he comes, and pierce and torture him to acquiescence. The East will send its penetrating blasts to blow the irritating dust into his eyes, and drive him to the shelter of his club; or, joining with the North, will eat their chilly way into his vitals and congest his liver till he doubts no more; while snappish friends will give their aid to drive conviction home.

It was March, then, and Maud Greville was to be married in April, before which time what a vast amount of important business there was to be transacted! what in-

numerable ante-matrimonial delights there were yet to be enjoyed, in regard to the selection of her trousseau! what handling of silks, and trying on of dresses, and choice of laces and baby caps!—but this is premature.

Mrs. Greville and her daughter arrived in London early in the month with a view to commencing operations in earnest, and took up their residence for a few days in Eaton Place.

Maud had of course communicated to Harry their intended visit to the metropolis. And when he turned up to see them on the afternoon of their arrival, he found the drawing-room strewed with parcels and millinery of every delightful kind. Mr. Egerton's orderly tastes were not now in the way to prevent the full enjoyment of their womanly love of disorder, and therefore, with bonnets not yet removed, mother and daughter were revelling in the surrounding disarray when Harry entered.

It seemed so strange to him being in his father's house again, and feeling that he had no connection with it—that he was there by

stealth as it were. And he couldn't help thinking that everything about him—all the furniture and every object he knew so well, was saying to him, "What business have you here? You have nothing to do with us now; get along with you—you don't belong to the family any more."

But when Maud sprang up, with her usual impetuosity, to meet and welcome him, and when Mrs. Greville, with tears in her eyes (for though weak in character, she was kind of heart), came forward to embrace him, Harry felt a little as if he did belong to them after all—although the arm-chair did try to make itself as uncomfortable as possible when he sat down.

"So you are actually going to be married, Maud?" he said, as she knelt by his chair and looked him over with such a pretty interest, while his aunt gazed into his face from an opposite sofa.

Yes, it was a fact, Maud said, blushing. And how Harry would like him when he knew him better! Didn't he think him wonderfully handsome? &c., &c.

"Quite an Adonis," he answered, smiling kindly at her enthusiasm.

"No, but really, Harry dear, you don't know how nice he is; and you ought to see the horse he has given me. Uncle Philip says he's quite perfect; I mean the horse; so is George, you know, too," she added, archly.

Mrs. Greville looked on and smiled; and then Maud broke away, at last, from this enthralling topic, and exclaimed—

"Now, do tell us what you have been doing all the winter. You hardly ever wrote, and we only heard of you by chance sometimes."

"Living a humdrum life in London most of the time, Maud," he said, "and very lively it was, too, I can tell you. I wonder you didn't see my name in the papers under the head of 'Melancholy Suicide of a Young Gentleman.'"

"Was it so dreadfully dull? I was *so* sorry for you, and we had such good hunting weather, too, before Christmas and lately. I'm sure Uncle Philip was very dull, too,

though he didn't say so. Wasn't he, mamma?"

"Indeed I couldn't say, my dear. I never attempt to pry into your uncle's feelings."

"Oh! but you know he was, mamma; you said you thought he was."

"Did I?" sighed Mrs. Greville. "I dare say I did."

It is very possible that the apparent lowness of her brother's spirit may have called forth such an observation, but he certainly had not confided the state of his feelings to his sister or to anybody else; that would have been tantamount to confessing himself in the wrong; or, at all events, to feeling regret that he had not acted differently. And if he had thought that any unusual depression might have been so construed, he would have made it a point to appear cheerful at any price.

"Why don't you go to him again?" Maud asked, laying her hand affectionately upon Harry's arm. "I'm sure he wouldn't be so hard now."

No use, Harry said. He knew his father too well; and his aunt agreed with him.

"But I do hope," she said, "that you haven't been betting and gambling again. Philip told us that you had."

"Philip!" cried Maud, scornfully; "yes, he's always trying to make you out much worse than you are, Harry. I can't bear him!"

"I don't think he has any very violent affection for me," said Harry. "What has he been saying about me?"

"Oh! all sorts of things. Have you seen him? He's in town."

"Only for a minute, and then we hadn't much to say to each other. I hope he isn't at home now; is he? He'll probably tell my father that I've been here, and ask him to cut down my allowance in consequence."

From the manner in which Harry spoke these words, it would not have required any considerable amount of perception to augur that he, too, did not bear any violent affection for Philip; and certainly he had no cause to do so.

"But what did he say about me?" he

continued, after being assured that Philip was out.

"Oh! he said that you were living very extravagantly, and keeping horses, and betting, and doing I don't know what besides. I believe he invented it all to make Uncle Philip more angry with you."

"Was that all he said? You told me something in a letter one day about his having talked as if I was not his brother, and wanted to know what I had done to him. What was it all about?"

"Oh yes, I forgot!" cried Maud. "You never told me. He had been saying all sorts of unkind things about you one day, and I told him that he ought to be ashamed to talk like that about his own brother; and then——"

"Hush! Maud, my darling; hush!" exclaimed her mother, in some agitation.

"Why should I hush, mamma?" rejoined Maud, looking quickly round at her.

"Philip is very odd," Mrs. Greville said; "he says such queer things. You should never repeat them, my child; you

will only make mischief;" and the mother looked apprehensively at her child as she spoke.

Maud, however, either misunderstood her anxiety, or wilfully disregarded it, for she broke out when her mother finished speaking: "I should think he does say queer things, mamma. He told me, Harry, that it was all very fine to talk about your being his brother, but there were a great many wonderful things happening every day; and I might, perhaps, be a little surprised some day to find that you were no relation to him at all."

"Maud! Maud!" exclaimed her mother, imploringly.

But Maud continued: "And when I asked him what he meant he wouldn't tell me, and wouldn't say anything more. 'We should all see what he meant some fine day,' he said, and then went out of the room; and I think I have disliked him more than ever since that."

Mrs. Greville was manifesting signs of great distress on the sofa, and tried feebly

change ideas at leisure without fear of rude disturbing human waves, which surge around, and carry you off *conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris*, even though you may be large of stature and firm of foot. They hold up to one's regret the memories of a time when you were not hurried on in the middle of a sentence to be grounded upon some other friend, who in her turn listens for a moment to your jerked-out utterances, until you are again borne on, and again the unfinished sentence dies upon the stifling air. Perhaps there are diverse currents setting through a doorway, and you meet your dearest friend but to be torn rudely from his embrace, *invalidasque tibi tendens, heu! non tua, palmas*, you are hurried on with the flow, while he drifts back upon the ebb. At another time you espy, from the bottom of a stair, the dear object for whom you have sacrificed your digestive calm, standing far out of your reach on the topmost step, firmly wedged, moving only as the current moves, and ever receding farther and still farther from your ravished gaze. To make head against the

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"But I do hope," she said, "that you haven't been betting and gambling again. Philip told us that you had."

"Philip!" cried Maud, scornfully; "yes, he's always trying to make you out much worse than you are, Harry. I can't bear him!"

"I don't think he has any very violent affection for me," said Harry. "What has he been saying about me?"

"Oh! all sorts of things. Have you seen him? He's in town."

"Only for a minute, and then we hadn't much to say to each other. I hope he isn't at home now; is he? He'll probably tell my father that I've been here, and ask him to cut down my allowance in consequence."

From the manner in which Harry spoke these words, it would not have required any considerable amount of perception to augur that he, too, did not bear any violent affection for Philip; and certainly he had no cause to do so.

"But what did he say about me?" he

continued, after being assured that Philip was out.

"Oh! he said that you were living very extravagantly, and keeping horses, and betting, and doing I don't know what besides. I believe he invented it all to make Uncle Philip more angry with you."

"Was that all he said? You told me something in a letter one day about his having talked as if I was not his brother, and wanted to know what I had done to him. What was it all about?"

"Oh yes, I forgot!" cried Maud. "You never told me. He had been saying all sorts of unkind things about you one day, and I told him that he ought to be ashamed to talk like that about his own brother; and then——"

"Hush! Maud, my darling; hush!" exclaimed her mother, in some agitation.

"Why should I hush, mamma?" rejoined Maud, looking quickly round at her.

"Philip is very odd," Mrs. Greville said; "he says such queer things. You should never repeat them, my child; you

will only make mischief;" and the mother looked apprehensively at her child as she spoke.

Maud, however, either misunderstood her anxiety, or wilfully disregarded it, for she broke out when her mother finished speaking: "I should think he does say queer things, mamma. He told me, Harry, that it was all very fine to talk about your being his brother, but there were a great many wonderful things happening every day; and I might, perhaps, be a little surprised some day to find that you were no relation to him at all."

"Maud! Maud!" exclaimed her mother, imploringly.

But Maud continued: "And when I asked him what he meant he wouldn't tell me, and wouldn't say anything more. 'We should all see what he meant some fine day,' he said, and then went out of the room; and I think I have disliked him more than ever since that."

Mrs. Greville was manifesting signs of great distress on the sofa, and tried feebly

to persuade her daughter that she should have more respect for her cousin; but Maud refused to be persuaded.

"You can't make me like him, mamma," she said, "if I don't; and why am I not to say so, if I do dislike him?"

Harry, during this time, had been lost in thought; and he broke silence at last by saying quietly—

"Do you know an old mad woman they call Biddy, at Castle Greville, aunt?"

Aunt looked scared. She believed that she did remember such a person as he mentioned.

Harry watched the effect of his question, and continued quietly again—

"Didn't she go abroad with us after my mother's death?"

"Yes,—yes," she answered, hurriedly. "But why—why do you ask these questions, Henry?"

"Oh, nothing. I only thought she seemed rather odd when she talked to me. How old was I when we came back to England? Wasn't Aunt Eleanor out there with my father?"

"Yes," Mrs. Greville answered, eagerly. "Yes,—ask her. She was with your father. She will know more about you. I never saw you for some years after your mother's death. Dear, dear! what it is to have a secret!" and the poor creature put her handkerchief to her eyes, and wept hysterically.

"There is a secret, then? You admit that?" said Harry.

"Secret! I never said so. Indeed—indeed, I have no wish to injure you, Henry. How very distressing this is!"

Maud had been looking from one to the other in much perplexity, and she now turned to Harry, and said, "What does all this about a secret mean, Harry? Do tell me."

"I should like to know too," said another voice behind her; and, turning round, they saw Philip standing contemplating the scene, with a look of eager curiosity on his face.

How long he might have been there they could neither of them tell, for they had been so absorbed for the last few moments

in their mysterious conversation that he had entered unperceived, and listened as long as he thought he could do so without detection. Maud shrank back a little at sight of him; for, though she braved his angry sarcasm sometimes, she was really afraid of his cold, insidious presence, and didn't know how far he might have heard her opinion of himself. He might have been listening outside the door, for all she knew; it was just the sort of thing he would do.

But her shrinking was only momentary; and she looked at him defiantly as she said, "You came very quietly into the room, Philip. I suppose you didn't want to disturb our conversation? It was very kind of you."

"I hardly expected to find a visitor," Philip rejoined, elevating his eyebrows, and glancing towards Harry.

"An unexpected pleasure for you, then!" said the latter.

That might or might not be. Philip's expression seemed to imply the latter; in fact, it was very much the latter, for this

afternoon, of all times, he was least disposed to be favourably inclined towards Harry.

He was even now on his return from a second failure in the region of Shoreditch. The first occasion on which he had presented himself, the door had been opened by the same woman whose veracity he had insulted on a previous occasion, and who had recognised him, and slammed the door in his face without further ceremony. She was apparently at the time the only inmate of the house; for, although he had continued to knock at the door and tap at the window for some minutes longer, no further notice had been taken of his presence, and he had been obliged to go away with his tail between his legs, gnashing his teeth with rage and mortification.

This afternoon he had returned to the charge; and although he had knocked and knocked, and could have sworn that he saw the figure of the old man behind the window-blind, his applications for admittance had not met with the slightest acknowledgment from within, and he had been obliged again

to return without having progressed one step further towards the accomplishment of his coveted end.

He had even debated in his mind, as he drove back from his bootless journey, whether it might not be advisable to take into his employ again the detective who had at least gained admittance to the house, —a point which he himself was not able to compass.

And then he thought of a disguise. Was he actor enough for a disguise? What pretence could he invent for approaching the subject, if he didn't go in his own proper person? The man never would confide in a second party. Philip was afraid that it might fail, notwithstanding his confidence in his own cleverness, and then he would have to begin all over again. There was so much matter for consideration as to the best course to be adopted under the circumstances, that he had little more than commenced to think about it when he reached his own door, and heard that his brother was in the drawing-room.

The man of all others most calculated to add fuel to his irritation at the present moment! "What does he mean," thought Philip, "by coming into the house when my father has told him never to show his face inside the door again? Cursed young scoundrel! I wish I'd been here when he came. I'd have let him know whose house it was!"

And with these cheerful and pleasant thoughts in his mind, Philip had pursued his way up-stairs, and hearing voices in the drawing-room, had, with a very commendable caution, stopped for a moment with his ear to the door, and heard Maud's eulogium on himself. A step in the hall below had caused him unwillingly to turn the handle when they were in the midst of that interesting discussion about some presumed secret; and he had fortunately been able to do it with such noiselessness and care that he had remained in the room without their knowledge until the pause occurred, when he deemed it prudent to discover himself.

"So he knows there's a secret, does he?" Philip thought, and he chuckled maliciously to himself as he continued—"He wouldn't be so anxious to find it out, if he knew as much as I do of it. Never mind, my *brother*, I promise you I'll spare no exertions to clear it up." And he laid by in his mind all that he had heard, all about the old woman at Castle Greville and Lady Belvedere (it might all come in useful some day). He added also another grain of hatred to his stock against Harry, because Maud took his part against him—as for her, he didn't care much for her dislike; it couldn't do him any harm, one way or the other. He determined, too, that his father should know that Harry had been spending the afternoon in his drawing-room. And many more equally praiseworthy and generous resolutions respecting his brother and his interests were stored away in his mind—all during those few moments which he stood there, and before he replied to Harry's last remark.

"I was under the impression," he said,

"that my father had forbidden you to enter this house any more. That is some months ago now; you seem to have forgotten it."

"Not at all," rejoined Harry, with perfect good temper. "But I came to see my aunt and cousin;" and he put his arm round Maud as he spoke.

"How can you be so ill-natured, Philip?" she exclaimed. "What business is it of yours if Harry comes here? The house doesn't belong to you!"

"Perhaps not," he rejoined; "but while I occupy it, I must see my father's wishes obeyed."

His affectation of filial duty was such a base hypocrisy, that Maud turned from him in disgust, and Harry contemplated his countenance with such a look of almost loathing (he couldn't help it, even though he was his brother), that Philip, happening to catch a glimpse of it, seemed to be for a moment even abashed, and conscious of his crawling reptile nature. But the feeling, if it existed, only gave a spur to his hatred of

the originator, and he turned to Harry with a doubly-concentrated spite, and said—

"I think I gave you a sufficiently strong hint that your presence here was contrary to my father's wishes."

He paused, and as Harry continued to look at him and didn't answer, he moved towards the bell.

"Philip—you are a brute!" exclaimed Maud, her eyes filling with indignant tears.

Mrs. Greville had hitherto been a passive spectator of the scene, having scarcely recovered from her late agitation. But when she observed Philip's intention, she started up, and, with an energy most unusual in her, arrested his outstretched arm, and said with some spirit, "No, Philip, you shall not insult any visitor of mine in this house. Henry has come to see me, and it is nothing to you how long he stays. I will be answerable to your father."

Philip looked at her,—such a look!—so full of everything that was mean and despicable!—and was about to pursue his original intention of summoning the ser-

vant, when Harry rose, and in a voice trembling with the scorn which he could barely suppress, told him to ring the bell if he pleased; the servant might open the door for him.

"Don't quarrel with him on my account, my dear aunt," he said; "it isn't worth it." And with Maud still clinging to his arm, he said good-bye, promising to see her again before they left town, and shut the door behind him.

When Maud re-entered the room, Philip was seated sullenly by the window, and only just looked up to receive the glance of indignant disgust which she threw at him as she sat down by her mother's side, and tried to soothe her tears by low-toned words of sympathy. Finding that the irrepressible consciousness of his own meanness was only aggravated by continuing in their presence, he rose from his chair a moment or two after, and left the room. His society is not sufficiently attractive, I think, to induce us to follow him just at present.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Grand National Hunt Steeple-chase came off this year in the Midland Counties. And thither Harry Egerton, in company with other sporting friends who were similarly interested, proceeded by an early train on the morning of the race.

The town was already alive to the excitement of the day. Numberless vehicles thronged the station-yard, on the look-out for unwary Cockneys or open-handed sportsmen. Boys and men at every corner thrust their cards upon your notice, ensnaring young greenhorns with the brevet bait of captain. Shopmen stood at their doors, envious spectators of the crowd which was streaming towards the course. Burly farmers loitered round the public-houses in hot discussion over their early brandy-and-water.

Stunted men, in jockey caps and long great-coats and boots, conferred importantly together, and hurried away upon mysterious errands. The usual hanger-on of the hunt, in his cast-off red coat and velvet cap, thrust his long services upon each successive arrival on the ground; and the gradually increasing roar of the book-makers showed that a great event was being handled.

Booths of dirty aspect, filled with every kind of disagreeable meat and drink, ornamented the neighbourhood of the stand. Vehicles of every nondescript description were drawing up to the ropes. Horses with dangling traces were being led away for the day. Riders innumerable were galloping backwards and forwards, reconnoitring the line of country and the points where the best views were to be had of the course. Horses, clothed and attended by groomy connoisseurs, were being led up and down the paddock, followed by anxious looks from their owners in the ring. Sporting men, in light trousers and rakish-looking hats and coats, were everywhere; and a bevy of fair

costumes in the stand gave an appearance of gaiety to an otherwise dirty and business-like scene.

The bell was ringing for the first race as Egerton and Skindles entered the enclosure, and found Castleton in a round hat, short coat, boots and breeches, booking another hundred about Black Prince. "Fit as be d——d!" was his reply to Egerton's inquiry after the prospects of his winning. "It's a —— certainty, if there's any luck."

He returned the pencil to the side of his heavily-gilt betting-book, adjusted the elastic, and replaced the book in his breast-pocket with an air of confidence which did not admit of a doubt.

"Come and look at him," he said; and, taking Egerton's arm, they strolled round to the paddock, where a groom was leading up and down in a quiet corner the magnificent black which Egerton intended should win him much money on this day.

"Looks like going, don't he?" asked the owner, as they stood admiring his points and his action as he passed before them.

"Ought to win, if looks go for anything," Harry answered. "I shall shoot some of these scoundrels for a hundred or two if he does."

What price was to be got about him? Egerton asked.

Castleton replied, with some neatly-chosen language, that three to one was all that they would offer now.

Black Prince, not having been in public before, had been low down in the betting until he came upon the course. His appearance had then attracted a few connoisseurs, who had intrusted him with a little money; and he had gradually risen in favour till, as Castleton said, he was now at three to one only.

Notwithstanding his short price, Egerton ventured more money upon him when he returned to the ring, having, as they say, "got the straight tip" from the owner himself, and heard all about the satisfactory results of recent trials.

It does not, however, always follow that "straight tips" from owners are to be relied

upon. Many owners of race-horses would think nothing of putting a friend in a hole, if it suited their purpose to do so. One of the useful lessons which much familiarity with the turf teaches is, that any principle which stands in the way of the interest of the individual may be sacrificed without remorse to the compassing of that ever-prominent end. And therefore, if one of these honourable patrons of our national sport thought that he could get a better price about his horse by telling his friend that the animal was no use, he would not for a moment scruple to do so. The friend, being known to have some knowledge of the stable, would lay against the horse; he would go down in the betting, the owner would put his money on, and the horse would win in a canter after all. And how surprised his owner would be! and what trouble he would take to explain to his friend afterwards that his trainer had assured him that he could not possibly win, and that he had not backed him for a shilling—his betting having all been done by commission.

Castleton, however, had always run his horses straight, so far, and behaved like a gentleman in all his racing transactions. But being necessarily mixed up a good deal with the very objectionable set of men called "gentlemen riders," it could hardly be expected that he would long retain his original proportion of the gentleman.

Few people can touch pitch without suffering the usual consequences. And when a man is continually coming in contact with other men who are gentlemen in name only, but who have long ago fashioned their morality upon recognised turf principles, he is not likely to retain in its integrity for very long that nice sense of honour with which he entered their society. Even if he does not conform to all the manners and customs of the sharp-witted fraternity by whom he is surrounded, still the laxity of principle which grows out of their calculating acuteness must insensibly affect even the best-disposed minds. They may at first have been shocked at the bare allusion to the trickery which they see

around them; but after the experience of a year or two they grow accustomed to it, and it begins to appear not only pardonable, but even admissible, since everyone does the same: that accommodating and convenient argument, which some even believe to be really sound. Just as if anything that was essentially wrong, disgraceful, and dishonest, was a bit the less so even if the whole world chose to join in the doing of it!

The only way to avoid becoming such a moral Gallio as the generality of gentlemen riders will be found to be, is to avoid their society altogether, and leave public riding to jockeys and professionals. Private races against other gentlemen are another thing altogether, and may be comparatively harmless, if you don't break your neck.

The first race or two on the card have been run off, luncheon has been discussed, and the saddling-bell for the Grand National is ringing.

The course is cleared—lines of county police press back the populace. The hunts-

man gallops down the open space, and cracks his whip at the inevitable dog. Everybody is returning to his post of vantage in carriage or in stand. Book-makers are yelling; backers leaning over the balcony, gesticulating eagerly; fast ladies looking flushed and anxious about their bets; and the horses, one by one, are appearing from the enclosure.

Egerton has taken up his position against the railing on the top of the stand, whence he has a view of the whole course, and is watching anxiously for Castleton's appearance. There he comes at last, with a calm, confident look, such as only a long training in steeple-chase riding can insure, and Harry is pleased to hear his own admiration of Black Prince echoed by some men behind him.

"Whose colours are those?" they ask each other; consult their cards, and wish they had backed him.

"He's the best-looking of the lot now," says one.

"If that's the owner up, he knows what

he's about as well as any of 'em," says another.

"Ay, that's the Earl; I knows his seat well," chimes in a third.

And they continue to gaze at Black Prince's muscular form until their attention is diverted to the favourite, who is now skimming past in his preliminary canter—looking very dangerous, Harry thinks, in his excitement—for he *was* unusually excited, having "plunged" upon this race far beyond his wont.

The shouting underneath becomes more intermittent—all the horses have cantered past—and they are now assembling at the starting-post.

A delay of a few minutes—the flag falls—and they're off—twelve of them, in a ruck to the first fence—but in the second field the colours of the favourite show to front at once.

"What the —— is he making the running like that for?" exclaims one of his backers, with a running commentary of expletives.

"Don't you see he can't hold him, stupid?" says another, without taking the glasses from his eye.

Egerton saw it, and fervently hoped that he might leave nothing in him for the end as he saw the favourite continuing to lead by several lengths for some distance further. "G—d! I thought that was Castleton," he exclaims suddenly, his heart in his mouth, as a horse crashes through the fourth fence and brings his rider heavily to the ground—while another, unable to wrench his horse aside from the gap, rides over his prostrate form, and leaves him to all appearance lifeless on the ground.

The horse was a black, but it was not Castleton's black, and the Earl's colours are again distinguished as they mount the hill, well up among the leading horses. Over they go! beautiful! one after another clears the made-up fence at the top, and they are streaming on towards the brook. The crowd at either side press forward to get a better view, regardless of official restraint—and the first horse takes a man right in the

middle of the chest as he lands from a tremendous fly, passes on unheeding, and another and another clear it. And then Egerton sees the next one refuse, and cause a momentary check to Castleton, who is coming up at racing speed behind. With an inward throb of nervous impatience he watches and trembles, as Black Prince, balked in his stride, rises in the air, and barely lands on the further side. The ground is slippery. He stumbles; falls; Castleton is down!

"*He's* out of it," says a man behind, directing his glasses after the leading horses again, and Harry's heart sinks within him, and his cheek grows a shade paler, as his own half-acknowledged fears are thus rudely confirmed.

"By ——, he's not, though!" exclaims another, as Castleton, picking himself up in an instant, springs upon his horse, and is away after the rest again, with hardly a moment's delay.

"That's the best piece of work ever I saw!" cries one.

"Ay! he deserves to win after that," says another.

But Egerton was no longer so hopeful. His distance had been increased alarmingly. And though he knew that Black Prince had a great turn of speed, yet it was a long way to make up.

The favourite was still leading, but closely waited on by two or three more, who were still going almost as fresh as ever.

The foot people hurry across to the next big jump which is accessible. The first horse is over already a couple of lengths; and then, thwack! blue and yellow goes sailing after him. One or two more follow, and then the next lands in the far grip, and rolls over upon his rider. Then Castleton's scarlet and black cap comes in sight, and Egerton sees him steady his horse, and then take the fence with a fly that brings down a shout of applause from the lookers-on; and he strains away after the leading horses, his distance now considerably diminished.

Harry's hope begins to revive, and in his

nervous excitement he turns round and angrily contradicts his neighbour, who says that the favourite *must* win.

They turn for home, and begin to put on the pace. The horsemen who had been at the last fence scurry through the gates in a jostling multitude to the winning-post. The talking on the stand is hushed, and every eye is bent eagerly upon the half-dozen horses still remaining in the race. Two or three of the leading ones are dropping to the rear. The favourite looks a little beat, and Black Prince, full of running, is drawing up. They are at the last fence; —and, oh! what a thrill Egerton felt! how the blood rushed to his cheek as he saw the leading horse—the favourite—strike the binder at the top, and come heavily down upon the other side!

A murmur of compassion or disappointment ran along the crowded ropes, as everyone saw that his chance was over; and our friend's heart beat fast and loud as he saw Black Prince, a moment or two after, clear

the fence into the straight, with only three horses now in front of him, two of which were evidently out of the race.

Castleton is still sitting quiet in his saddle, but rapidly diminishing the distance between himself and the leading three. Black Prince's speed is here beginning to tell. First one, then another is passed. "Can he catch him?—is there time?" thinks Egerton in an ecstasy of excitement, as he leans over the railings, joining his own eager shouts to the cries which filled the air—"Black Prince wins—Black Prince!" and they race past the stand, Castleton coming up in every stride—hands, whip, and head going now, if ever they went—three strides and they're at the post. "He can't do it! he'll just be beat!" But, see! in the last stride the leading horse gives in; his pluck deserts him as he feels that the other is gaining on him; and Black Prince shooting up to his head, they pass the post neck and neck. So it seemed from the stand; and the shouts from the backers of either horse, and cries of

"Dead heat!" produced an agonising suspense until the numbers went up.

"Thank God!" gasped Egerton, as he fell back from the strained position in which he had been, pale with excitement, for the last few moments. Black Prince had won.

Such exciting races are fortunately rare. Many such trials to the nerves would shorten a man's existence.

"By Jove! I had a squeak for it," thought Harry, as he elbowed his way downstairs. "It was touch and go! Didn't think he'd have done it!" And he tried ineffectually to make his way out into the enclosure faster than the crowd would permit.

At last he made his way through, and found Castleton just returning to the weighing-room amid the cheers of the ring. Having lost no inconsiderable portion of his property to them already, they could afford to be kindly disposed towards him.

His face was a little sun of satisfaction as he responded to the congratulations of his friends on returning from scale—his lan-

guage the most lively mixture of oath and gaiety of expression.

"Wont your money, old boy?" to Harry. "I told you it was the d—dest certainty out. Though, by ——! I thought I was out of it when the —— came down at that —— water."

In the midst of the ovation of compliments which his skill and judgment were receiving, the rider of the favourite, pale as death, and evidently in great pain, was assisted past the group into the dressing-room, and Castleton immediately hurried after him to condole with him upon his hard luck, and to inquire after his injuries.

Egerton and his friends continued to discuss the race, and congratulate each other on the success of their good thing; and they were very pleasantly facetious (some of the more impecunious among them) with the book-makers from whom they had won. If the issue had been different, how would they be feeling now—Harry at all events?

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around them; but after the experience of a year or two they grow accustomed to it, and it begins to appear not only pardonable, but even admissible, since everyone does the same: that accommodating and convenient argument, which some even believe to be really sound. Just as if anything that was essentially wrong, disgraceful, and dishonest, was a bit the less so even if the whole world chose to join in the doing of it!

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